

Dragon Ball Super Z Episode 1: Walk This World

by Juuhachi-gou

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Summary: After returning to his apocalyptic future, Mirai Trunks destroyed the Jinzouningen and Cell. Then what...?

Dragon Ball Super Z Episode 1: Walk This World

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Dragon Ball Super Z

> Episode One
 ****WALK THIS WORLD****

> Juuhachi-gou and Mirai Bulma******

>

Part One

> "With the Light in Our Eyes It's Hard to See"

>

_I have slept beside the winter and the green is growing slow

> I have watched you find the places hidden by the snow
 I have tripped into a valley where it's blue till you can't see

> I want you to come walk this world with me

>

>

The sky was a dull gunmetal gray, a featureless cloud cover obscuring everything overhead except the faintest patch of light from the late afternoon sun. A cold bitter wind kicked up the dust from the roadside at her feet, but she barely felt it even though her clothes were thin and tattered. She didn't look up at the cars that roared

by, even those that passed close to her; any shouts or whistles fell on ears that might as well have been deaf for all the attention she paid to it.

>
 Her head was a buzz of confusion. She didn't know how long she'd been walking, or even when she'd begun to do so. She didn't know where she'd come from, and she certainly didn't know where she was going.

>
 She only knew she didn't know much of anything at all. Not even her own name.

>
 The road took a sharp turn to the south, but she continued walking east, in the same more or less straight line she'd followed for--she didn't remember. Her eyes were perpetually fixed on the ground several paces ahead. Occasionally she swiped a stray lock of blonde hair from her face.

>
 She felt the first few drops on her skin, and finally stopped when it began to rain in earnest. She lifted her head and looked around.

>
 She appeared to be standing near the outskirts of a large city. There was some new construction, and a great deal of rubble had obviously been cleared away, but some old ruins still stood, cracked and blasted open, husks of buildings standing like mammoth gravestones on the landscape. The newer, undamaged structures seemed pathetically small by comparison.

>
 A dome sat closer by, to the northeast; on closer inspection, she could make out the writing across the sloping surface of the hemisphere: CAPSU...the rest curved out of sight along the outer wall.

>
 Capsule Corporation? Those words sprang into her mind for no reason, but it was enough to spur her on towards the dome to see if her guess was correct.

>
 It was the first thing she'd found that looked even remotely familiar.

>

>

The office was lit only by the display on the computer screen. Bulma's nimble fingers flew over the keys swiftly, entering data as fast as her mind could produce it. As engrossed as she was in her latest pet project, she kept one ear cocked for the return of her son.

>
 She paused long enough to lean back and stretch. She couldn't help smiling at herself for worrying about Trunks. It wasn't as if the boy (well, he was hardly a boy anymore, but considering her son an adult reminded her of how much time she was carrying around) couldn't look after himself...he did a very good job, in fact, of looking after both of them. Not to mention the rest of the world...what was left of it.

>
 Any way one looked at it, the present situation was nothing short of grim. What the artificial humans hadn't destroyed in their seventeen-year rampage, Cell had very nearly finished before Trunks had killed him. Of a planetary population of several billion, there were less than a hundred thousand humans left alive.

>
 Hope City, built up amongst the ruins left by the cyborgs, was one of the more thriving communities. Tiny settlements around the world like it were linked by old-fashioned radio communication, but Hope boasted the benefit of having a genius with astonishing

technological resources living on its outskirts. Herself.

>
 Bulma scrolled through the specifications she'd finished typing in from her perfect memory and leaned back, sighing. This was one project she'd shared with no one, not even Trunks; in the lower levels of Capsule Corporation was an area he had thankfully not even considered going into, which was good, because he couldn't have without blasting his way in. Bulma had restricted the entry access code to herself alone.

>
 She didn't know if it would work, and it would be pointless to get anyone's hopes up but hers before she actually was ready to make the attempt to...

>
 A sound at the front of the building made her look around. Bulma quickly saved her work, shut down the system and went to the door of the lab. "Oi, Trunks-kun, home already?" she called down the hallway.

>
 Slow, hesitant steps--not at all like Trunks' steady, confident stride--approached. A slender female figure appeared--drenched to the skin, her hair in her face. Her clothes were caked with dirt, hanging in tatters from her slender frame. One barely-visible eye looked at Bulma with no readable emotion.

>
 "What in the world...?!" Bulma started toward her, but something--some vague but chilling apprehension--made her pause. The newcomer had obviously been through some kind of ordeal, and yet...and yet..."Are you hurt? What happened to you?"

>
 The girl's mouth opened, and she drew a soft breath. "This...is Capsule Corporation...?"

>
 "Yes, it is," Bulma said briskly. The girl was soaking wet, mud-streaked, probably starving, and not making any overt gestures of hostility. She looked to be no threat whatsoever. Even so, Bulma's nameless unease refused any attempt at dismissal. "My name's Bulma. What's yours? Are you hurt?"

>
 The girl shook her head. Her straight blonde hair, heavy with rainwater, barely moved. "I...I know this place...I know the name, but...I don't remember why. I don't remember...anything." She swiped the hair from her face and looked at Bulma with pleading eyes.

"Please...do you know who I am?"

>
 It was the face. The expression was alien on that face, but Bulma recognized it immediately. An ice-cold shock of blind terror flooded her nerves. Her breath hitched in her throat, but she managed to force out one word.

>
 "_Jinzouningen_..." she gasped, backing away. She was in the doorway of her lab; there was nowhere else to go, nowhere to run.

"_Jinzouningen!!_"

>
 Juuhachi-gou followed her into the lab. "Wait! Don't be afraid," she begged. "I don't want any trouble. I just want to know who I am."

>
 Bulma stumbled backwards against a lab table and fell. Test-tubes and computer disks and files scattered across the floor, glass crashing into shards, papers rustling, the table skittering aside with a tinny clatter. Bulma landed heavily on her back, the breath knocked out of her. Unable to move, unable to think, she gasped for breath that wouldn't come as the slim figure stepped closer.

>
 You're dead! Bulma's fear-crazed mind screamed, but she couldn't form the words. _Trunks killed you and your brother both. Three years ago!! You can't be here, I'm going insane, this isn't happening, Trunks where are you HELP ME!!!_

>
 Juuhachi-gou stopped a few feet away. Her smooth, flawless features bore a stamp of complete incomprehension. She shook her head as if trying to deny Bulma's panic. "Why are you so scared of me? Do

you know me? Have I...have I done something to hurt you? I swear, I don't remember..."

>
 When she wasn't immediately struck dead, Bulma's brain kicked into high gear despite the racing of her heart. Obviously the female cyborg was disoriented. At least Juuhachi-gou's confusion would give Bulma a chance to think her way out of the situation. She had to stay calm and hope that Trunks would get back soon. Minutes passed as Bulma caught her breath, and her uninvited visitor didn't move. Juuhachi-gou just looked at Bulma, with that same blank look in her luminous eyes.

>
 Finally the cyborg shook her head. "I...I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--whatever it was I've done, I'm sorry." Incredibly, her breath hitched; it sounded remarkably like a sob. "I won't bother you anymore. I'll just go." She turned hastily away and headed for the door, her bare feet soundless on the tile floor.

>
 "_Matte yo_!" Bulma called, struggling to her feet. She still wasn't sure this wasn't some kind of sick game Juuhachi-gou was playing, but she was willing to try to find out. "Wait...please!"

>
 Juuhachi-gou stopped dead still. Slowly she looked back at Bulma. The unrelenting white glare of the fluorescent ceiling lights glinted off the unmistakable glimmer of tears in the Jinzouningen's eyes.

>
 Tears. From _this_ creature? Impossible...but Juuhachi-gou was looking back at her with such despairing loss...if it was an act, it was a damned good one.

>
 Bulma cleared her throat and swallowed hard. "You...you really don't remember, do you? Don't you know your name? Who you are? What you've done?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou shook her head. "No." She looked shattered, defenseless, not even of an age to match her designation. She looked like a lost child. "I remember...walking. Alongside the road. Not too many cars...It was cold, and windy...and then it started raining, and I came here." She fell silent and wrapped her arms around herself as if to stave off a sudden chill--a chill from the void inside her.

>
 "That's it?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou nodded once. "Can you...can you help me? Please...if I've done anything against you, I'll make it up to you somehow." She blinked, and one tear escaped, sliding softly down her mud-spattered cheek. "Please, I'll do anything you want...if only you'll help me remember."

>
 It was some time before Bulma could do anything besides stare at her.

>

>

Trunks shifted his load to a more comfortable position on his shoulder and picked up speed. He probably should've taken the car, but he never knew when Bulma might need it, and it was just as easy for him to fly the relatively short distance to Hope's market. He took it upon himself to do the grocery shopping primarily because he was the one who consumed most of the food in the house.

>
 When he landed in front of the dome, the first thing he noticed was the fact that the front door was standing wide open. A scowl settled on his normally gentle features. He set the boxes and bags

down at the doorstep and walked inside.

>
 "Kaa-san?" he called.

>
 The immediate answer he received set his mind at rest. "Trunks? Hold on, I'll be there in a sec!" He heard his mother talking in soft tones to someone who gave a small grunt as a reply. Company? Well, it wasn't unheard of for them to have visitors, although people very rarely came to Capsule Corp. unannounced. It made Trunks glad that his mother had someone to talk to for once instead of hunching over her computer virtually every waking moment as she'd done for the past six months.

>
 Bulma appeared, wearing a kitchen apron over her denim coveralls. "Good, you're home!" she said brightly, but Trunks suspected some of the cheer was forced. Why? "Be a good boy and bring those groceries inside before they get soaked."

>
 "It's not raining now, Kaa-san." Trunks moved the purchases inside and closed the door. "Who's here? Someone I know?"

>
 Bulma grimaced a little, her eyes widening. "Well...sort of..."

>
 "Hn?"

>
 "Now, Trunks, don't go ballistic on me, okay? Hear me out before you say or do anything. Promise me?"

>
 "Okay...Kaa-sanr, what is it? Is something wrong?"

>
 "Well, yes and no." She stole a nervous glance back over her shoulder in the direction of the kitchen. "Trunks, listen to me."

>
 "I'm listening, Kaa-san."

>
 Bulma took a deep breath. "There is someone here...she's come a long way from...wherever she came from. She's suffering amnesia; she doesn't remember anything."

>
 "She?" Trunks echoed. "A woman?"

>
 "Yes. She's been here for over an hour; she took a quick bath and I gave her some of my old things to wear...they're practically falling off of her, the poor thing. Now listen!" She grabbed Trunks' arm as he started towards the kitchen. "You have to promise to stay calm--and keep an open mind, please? Remember she has no memories of anything that's happened, although I don't know what her reaction will be to seeing you."

>
 "Seeing...me?" Now Trunks was completely lost. "Is she someone we know?"

>
 Bulma nodded grimly. "Just come with me. And do nothing--nothing--unless you have to. Understand?" Bulma lifted two of the bags in her arms and started off down the hall. "And bring the rest of that stuff, okay?"

>
 Trunks picked up the bulk of his purchases and headed after his mother.

>
 The first thing he saw in the kitchen was a small female sitting at the table with her back to them. She was hunched over; the only things he could see at first glance was that she had pale straight blonde hair and that Bulma's old olive-green Capsule Corporation T-shirt was, indeed, nearly swallowing her narrow frame whole.

>
 "Are you still not hungry?" Bulma ventured as she set the bags down on the counter near the refrigerator.

>
 A shake of the head. "I'm fine, but thank you for the tea. And the clothes."

>
 That voice. It was a voice Trunks still heard sometimes in his dreams, the dreams where Gohan died again and again...it made Trunks drop everything he was carrying. The paper sacks ripped open when they hit the floor, spilling their contents at his feet.

>
 Juuhachi-gou turned sharply around and looked at him with her

wide pale eyes.

>
 "_Trunks_!" Bulma's voice whipcracked. "You promised!"

>
 It took every ounce of self-control Trunks had not to go Super-Saiyajin and blast the cyborg to hell right then and there. Again.

>
 Juuhachi-gou swallowed hard and watched him. A frown creased her high white forehead. "Do I...do I know you...?"

>
 "Jinzouningen..." Trunks hissed through his teeth. He could feel the rage building inside him. For a moment he was a boy of thirteen again, kneeling beside Gohan's ruptured body, wanting nothing more than to completely obliterate the things that had killed him. And for one of them, the more powerful and dangerous of the two, to be here, in his house, with his mother...!

>
 "That's what she called me," Juuhachi-gou said, indicating Bulma with a toss of her head. "What does it mean? Is that my name? What kind of a name is that?"

>
 "Juuhachi-gou," Bulma said quietly.

>
 She looked around. "Number Eighteen?"

>
 "Artificial Human Number Eighteen. That's who you are."

>
 Juuhachi-gou shook her head. "I don't understand..."

>
 "_Shineeeeeee_!!!" A burst of light erupted from Trunks' skin. His hair blazed fiercely gold, spiking up from his head, wafting on waves of pure energy that radiated out from him. Cans clattered away from him across the floor as his hands began to glow. Sacks ruptured open, spilling flour and sugar in white clouds. "I'm going to make you die!"

>
 Before Juuhachi-gou could do anything in response, Bulma was standing in front of her, arms outstretched to either side, defiantly facing her son. "Trunks!" she shouted. "Put a lid on it now! Juuhachi-gou's done nothing to me. Don't you get it? She's practically helpless. She doesn't remember a thing. Where's the honor in killing someone who hasn't done anything to you?"

>
 "Just how the hell long do you expect it to remain helpless?!" Trunks snarled. "Sooner or later it'll remember what it is, and then we'll all be dead if we don't kill it first!"

>
 "That's your father talking! Remember what you told me? That other world's Juuhachi-gou redeemed herself. Why can't ours?"

>
 "Um...excuse me..." Juuhachi-gou looked around Bulma's shoulder. "I don't completely understand any of this, but...if it's that much trouble for me to be here, I'll be happy to go."

>
 "You're not leaving here alive!" Trunks roared. "Kaa-san, get out of the way!"

>
 "Would you at least mind telling me why you want to kill me?" Juuhachi-gou said, showing more confusion than fear. She displayed no inclination whatsoever to take offensive action.

>
 Bulma racked her brain for some way to defuse the volatile situation. The wisest course of action would have been to let Trunks blow the Jinzouningen clear to hell, but something in her better nature wouldn't let her just stand by and let such a thing happen. "Juuhachi-gou, sit down. It's a long and ugly story, but I'll be happy to tell you everything I know. Trunks, turn it off. You're wrecking the wallpaper."

>
 "Kaa-san--!!!" Trunks screamed in rage and frustration.

>
 "I mean it, young man! Power down, or leave. Now."

>
 With a final cry of outrage, Trunks' battle-aurea vanished. He returned to normal and stalked to the far end of the kitchen, where he could get a clear shot at his enemy.

>
 With a huff of breath Bulma turned to Juuhachi-gou. "Go on, sit down. This is going to take a while."
>

>

Trunks stood against the far wall and glowered murderously at Juuhachi-gou throughout Bulma's drawn-out explanation of past events. He didn't understand how someone as intelligent as his mother could be deceived by Juuhachi-gou's ruse, but he wasn't going to let his guard down for a moment.

>
 Juuhachi-gou professed no memory whatsoever of Dr. Gero, or of any of the other cyborgs he'd created. She vaguely remembered the Red Ribbon Army, but she claimed to have no real idea what it was or had been. She listened quietly as Bulma related the story of Gokou's death. Her expression grew more somber by the moment as she heard how she and her brother Juunana-gou had ravaged the world for nearly twenty years before Trunks had destroyed them. Bulma didn't go into painstaking details--she didn't mention any of the other warriors who'd fallen by name, particularly not Gohan--but it was enough to give Juuhachi-gou a clear idea of the atrocities she and Juunana-gou had committed.

>
 When Bulma finished, there was silence for a time. Then, quietly, Juuhachi-gou spoke. "Incredible. It's...I can't...none of it makes any sense, and yet...I know you're telling the truth."

>
 "And you're sorry for what you've done?" Bulma prodded, with a quick glance at her son. Trunks didn't take his eyes off the cyborg.

>
 Juuhachi-gou thought hard about it. Then she sighed and shrugged. "Sorry? Of course I'm sorry, but what's the point? I can't undo the damage."

>
 "Damned right you can't," Trunks snarled, ignoring his mother's warning glare.

>
 Bulma tried again. "Do you still want to kill humans?"

>
 "No! Why would I want to kill anybody?"

>
 "And you're not going to go on another rampage and blast everything in sight to rubble, are you?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou shook her head. "No. No, absolutely not. I don't even understand why I was doing it in the first place. If what you say is true, and I am some kind of...of artificial human, then maybe I was programmed for it. But now? No. I see no need for senseless destruction. God..." She ran her hands through her still-damp (but now clean) hair. "It's like waking up one morning to find out you were Hitler."

>
 "Hitler didn't destroy the world." Trunks folded his arms. "He only killed six million people. You and your brother slaughtered billions."

>
 Juuhachi-gou sighed and stood up. "Listen, I may not have my whole head together, but I can tell I'm not doing any good hanging around here. Thank you for your help, Bulma...I think I need to go now. Don't worry; I have no intention of going on any more rampages'." She smiled crookedly. "I'm not sure exactly what it is I _will_ _do...but no, nothing like that. No one has anything to fear from me. Not anymore."

>
 "We can't just let you leave," Trunks said, pushing himself away from the wall. "Why the hell should we believe you? Why should we believe all of this isn't just some new game of yours?" He

approached until he was less than an arm's reach away from her, uncomfortably close to this thing he'd hated all his life. "Oh, and while I'm asking, one more thing: why the hell aren't you dead, considering the fact that I killed you along with your damned brother?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou met his gaze without flinching. "You can believe me or not, it makes no difference to me. As far as why I'm not dead--I have no idea." Her jaw took a stubborn set. "I'm sure you remember the circumstances of my death far better than I do."

>
 "I'll do a better job this time," he promised darkly.

>
 She folded her arms and lifted her chin defiantly. "I'm not going to fight you. I don't want to cause any trouble. Please, just let me go."

>
 "No way."

>
 "_Yamero!_" Bulma snapped. "This isn't getting us anywhere. Juuhachi-gou, if you really don't have any clear idea of where you're going from here, why don't you stay for a while at least? You could...well, you could make up for some of what you and your brother did by helping us rebuild."

>
 The cyborg considered for a moment. "I don't know...I mean, I don't have anywhere else to go, but..." She spared a look at the seething Trunks. "Can you keep him from killing me?"

>
 "No," Trunks replied with a terrible grin.

>
 "_Yes_" Bulma said at the same moment. "Trunks, this is my house, my life, and my decision," she added as her son started to protest. "We need all the help we can get, and if I didn't believe in giving lost causes a second chance you wouldn't be here right now. After all, your father originally came to this planet to destroy it, remember?"

>
 "This thing killed my father," Trunks said, stepping back and jabbing a finger at Juuhachi-gou. "I won't stay under the same roof with it."

>
 "_Oh_ yes you will_" Bulma's retort brooked no argument. "I'm pulling mommy rank on you. And stop calling her a 'thing' and 'it'. Artificial or not, Juuhachi-gou's human. You don't have to like her, just don't start with her unless she starts with you. I mean it."

>
 Trunks was a proud fighter, but respect for the woman who bore him carried a lot of weight with him. He grudgingly nodded his obedience, then growled at Juuhachi-gou, "I'll be watching you every moment, Jinzouningen."

>
 Juuhachi-gou cocked her head and sighed. "Whatever."

>

>

Bulma's Journal, 210 days after Cell:

>
 It hasn't been easy. I don't think Trunks has forgiven me even though it's been over a month since Juuhachi-gou came to stay with us. She still claims to remember nothing of significance. I've begun assigning her tasks in the lab to keep her busy; she's certainly a capable worker, but she's obviously quickly bored. I sent her out foraging with Trunks this afternoon after eliciting a promise from my son that he won't do anything rash. He promised to keep a close eye on her. I hope I haven't made a mistake, but I really need some time to myself. There's so little time left... _

>

Trunks wore the scowl that had been stamped on his face since that afternoon in the kitchen. He kept stealing glances at his passenger in the red skycar; if Juuhachi-gou was aware of his scrutiny, she gave no sign of it. She was obviously enjoying the ride, the wind whipping through her sunlight-colored hair.

>
 The car touched down outside one of the many wrecked and shattered ruins on the other side of what Bulma had taken to calling the Badlands. "Get anything useful you can find and bring it back to the car," Trunks said tersely as he got out. "We're looking for non-perishable foodstuffs, medicines, and basic electronic equipment that can be cannibalized for parts, in that order."

>
 Juuhachi-gou jumped nimbly to the ground, looking at the ruined buildings with frank curiosity. "What hit this place?"

>
 "You did." Trunks scowled at her. "You and your brother."

>
 "...oh."

>
 "You still don't remember?"

>
 "No." She turned away from him, the wind teasing through her cornsilk hair. "No, not a thing."

>
 Trunks strapped his sword to his back, never letting his eyes stray from his unwelcome companion. "Well, the two of you did this to most of the cities on this planet."

>
 "So you keep telling me." Her eyes scanned the wreckage. "It looks like we did a pretty thorough job. Any survivors?"

>
 "Not enough."

>
 "No, I don't suppose there would have been, in this mess." She kicked at the remains of a portable radio transmitter; the box fell over with a rusty creak.

>
 "Don't you even care? Can't you at least pretend to be sorry?"

>
 Her pale eyes fixed on him, her straight hair swinging around her face as her head came around. She fixed him with a glare blazing with desperate fury. "I don't have to pretend. Of course I'm sorry! Baka! What the hell do you think? How would you feel if somebody told you that you were half responsible for destroying the world, and you couldn't remember one damned thing about it?!"

>
 Trunks folded his arms and glowered at her. "Don't expect any sympathy from me."

>
 "I'm not that stupid. Let's just do what we came here to do and get back, okay?" She turned and walked off towards what had once been a hospital, the once-white walls now grey, dust-streaked and pitted.

>
 Trunks growled deep in his throat and flew after her. He wasn't about to let her--it--out of his sight.

>
 She turned as he came up behind her. He stopped, hovering about a meter from her. "How do you do that?" she asked.

>
 "What? Fly? Oh, gomen," he said in a voice heavy with sarcasm. "I suppose you've forgotten how."

>
 She looked at him and blinked. Then she turned her back on him and jumped into the air.

>
 She landed in the dust, sprawled flat on her face. Slowly she picked herself up off the ground, brushing at her clothes. She kept her head down, not looking at him, evidently embarrassed by the gaffe.

>
 Trunks just watched her. The Juuhachi-gou he had grown up hating would have never made such a fool of herself. Never. Embarrassed? She would have been furious. She would have attacked him simply out of blind rage. He watched her closely for any sign of aggression.

>
 Finally she met his eyes sullenly. "What the hell are you looking at?" She spun on her heel and kept going. He looked after her for a moment, struggling to grasp something incomprehensible. Then he shook his head sternly. This woman is my enemy. I tolerate her continued existence out of respect for my mother, but I can never forgive her, no matter what. Never.

>
 Having an extra pair of hands to help shift the larger pieces of rubble was convenient, and Juuhachi-gou proved to have a quick eye for scrounging, catching things Trunks himself might have missed. Trunks had to keep reminding himself that this city wouldn't have been rubble if it weren't for Juuhachi-gou and her brother. She took his harshly-worded instructions without complaint or rebuttal.

>
 "Be careful with those antibiotics," he ordered her as she hauled a marked container from the wreckage. "The glass will break if you drop it."

>
 "Hai, hai," she answered, carrying the container under one arm back to the skycar. Trunks picked up the last of the crates he'd found in the basement they'd uncovered and flew after her. He was so intent on glaring at Juuhachi-gou, watching her every move, that he didn't see the fragment of dust-covered wall until his shoulder knocked into it. Jarred, he lost his grip on the crate, and a couple of bottles of spring water fell out of the half-opened crate to the rocky ground, smashing open on impact.

>
 Juuhachi-gou looked back over her shoulder at him. "Be careful with those bottles," she called to him mildly. "The glass will break if you drop it."

>
 "Onoreeeee...." Trunks almost threw the crate in the back of the skycar, not caring how many more bottles he broke. He got behind the wheel and started the engine. Juuhachi-gou barely had time to get in before the car was speeding back towards what was left of Capsule Corporation.

>

>

Bulma's Journal, 221 days after Cell:

>
 Trunks went back yesterday to try to find any trace of the remains of Juuhachi-gou's brother. He easily determined where Juuhachi-gou must've dug herself out, but other than a red bandanna, no trace of Juunana-gou. Nor was there any sign of Juunana-gou having emerged from the rubble the way Juuhachi-gou did. Trunks is convinced that if Juuhachi-gou survived, so must her brother have done. We haven't heard of any sightings, though, so until we have proof, there's not much we can do.

>
 I'll have to keep a close watch on things to make sure neither Trunks nor Juuhachi-gou stumble across what I'm doing. I don't want to cause more trouble; Kami-sama knows it's bad enough already living under the same roof with those two..._

>

>

The biting grate of a whetstone drawn across sharp steel was the only sound that disturbed the morning stillness. Trunks worked relentlessly at honing a blade that was already sharp enough to part flesh at a touch and tried hard to ignore the pair of pale eyes focused on him.

>
 Juuhachi-gou sat on the wall nearby, watching him intently as though the sharpening of a sword was the most fascinating thing she'd ever seen. The sun had broken through the cloud cover this morning and shone a pale, watery light on the broken landscape.

>
 Finally Trunks could bear the scrutiny in silence no longer. "What the hell do you want?" he asked without looking up, voice a roughened snarl of warning.

>
 "Nothing," she answered, undisturbed.

>
 "Then leave me alone."

>
 "I'm not doing anything to you."

>
 His head whipped around and he glared at her. "You're staring at me."

>
 "A cat may look at a king. Besides, you're pretty to look at."

>
 "Shut up."

>
 "You don't look much like your mother."

>
 "I look like my father. The man you killed."

>
 "I don't remember it, but that doesn't matter." Juuhachi-gou leapt with catlike grace from the wall and stood in front of him. "I can't do anything but say I'm sorry, and I am. Truly."

>
 Trunks snorted. "That won't bring my father back."

>
 "No, it won't." She folded her arms and looked down, kicking idly at a stone half-imbedded in the dusty soil. "If I could give my life to bring him and the others back, I would."

>
 "I don't believe you."

>
 "Bulma believes me."

>
 "_I_ don't."

>
 "Why not? It's the truth."

>
 "My mother didn't see what you and your brother were like. She didn't fight you. She didn't see you murder Gohan. She doesn't understand."

>
 "You're the one who doesn't understand." She set her hands on her hips and fixed him with a cool, steady glare. "I know I can't change the way you think of me. I really don't care. You can hate me till the crack of doomsday and it won't matter to me. But there's no peace in this house, and it's tearing your mother apart. For her sake--hers, not mine--could you at least try to be civil to me in front of her from now on?"

>
 She took another step forward and stopped when Trunks sprang to his feet and faced her, his hateful glare daring her to come any closer.

>
 Trunks trembled with the visible effort to restrain himself. He wanted to smash his fist into her face so badly.

>
 Juuhachi-gou looked at him for a long, measuring moment and sighed.

>
 Then she drew back and hit him across the jaw.

>
 At that moment, Bulma opened the door and looked out. "There you are, you two. Lunch is ready--_TRUNKS!!!! Nande kuso--?!?!_"

>
 Trunks froze, his hair flaring gold. Juuhachi-gou lay sprawled prone on the ground at his feet, unmoving. His sword was in his

hands, its edge a hair's breadth from the cyborg's exposed throat.

>
 Bulma ran up behind Trunks, but she couldn't touch him through the Super Saiya-jin aura. Her skin tingled and burned from the backwash of energy emanating from her son. "What the hell is going on?" she demanded.

>
 "_Kaa-san_, don't interfere." Trunks' voice was cold with hatred.

>
 He tensed as Juuhachi-gou stirred. She slowly looked up at him. The left side of her lovely face was a single massive bruise, blood trickling from the side of her delicate child's-pout mouth. She looked up at Trunks with the eye that wasn't swollen shut with an unsteady half-grin. "Remind me...not to do that again," she husked. "You're a lot stronger than you look. That's one hell of a right cross you have."

>
 "_Naaaaaani_?!" Bulma blinked. "Trunks, put that thing away. Juuhachi-gou, what happened?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou sighed. "Stress is the body's natural reaction to suppressing the overwhelming desire to beat the hell out of someone you think desperately deserves it. Things have been pretty tense around here lately, so I thought maybe if Trunks got the chance to rough me up, he'd be able to blow off some steam. So, brilliant me, I hit him because I knew he would never throw the first punch. Me and my bright ideas..."

>
 "You _what?!_ Juuhachi-gou! That was a phenomenally _stupid_ thing to do!"

>
 "Tell me about it." The cyborg looked up at Trunks, who was still radiating Super Saiya-jin energy. The point of his blade still quivered at her throat. "Look, either kill me or back off. Okay?"

>
 "Trunks, don't do it." Bulma watched him, seeing Vegeta's fury stamped on the features of the son who never knew him. Trunks was at that moment a very, very dangerous man. A Saiya-jin's temper was nothing to be trifled with. _Juuhachi-gou hasn't a clue how close to death she really is...if I hadn't come out here at just that moment, she'd be dead right now._

>
 With a snarl Trunks yanked his blade back and stepped away. Rocks and debris pelted to the ground around them as his golden aura faded. His hair fell around his face and returned to its usual lavender color. "Thank my mother for your life," he growled. He turned his back and flew up into the clear sky and was gone.

>
 Bulma stepped forward and offered Juuhachi-gou her hand. "Don't ever provoke Trunks like that again. You have no idea..."

>
 "I'm beginning to _get_ one. And--thank you." Juuhachi-gou accepted the hand and pulled Bulma right down on top of her. "Ack--! _Gomen..._"

>
 Bulma pushed off of her, sat up and laughed. "It's all right. I forgot how heavy you really are." Her face grew serious. "Just tread carefully around Trunks from now on, _ne?_"

>
 "_Hai._" Juuhachi-gou stood up, took Bulma's hand and pulled her to her feet.

>
 "Well, there's still lunch if you want it. I know you don't eat much, but..."

>
 "I'll make the effort, but let me get changed first. I hate bleeding all over new clothes, but it's my own stupid fault."

>
 Juuhachi-gou went inside; Bulma paused long enough to look up at the empty sky and sigh. "Trunks..." Shaking her head, she went in and closed the door softly behind her.

>

>

_Bulma's Journal, 242 days after Cell:

>
 I'm running out of supplies quickly. I didn't know when I started this project of mine how many resources would be depleted, or how fast. I suppose I should be grateful to Juuhachi-gou, in a way; Trunks is so busy being mad at her that he hasn't really bothered to take much notice of what I'm doing. At least she's not giving him any excuses to light into her anymore. All he does is work on his sword and stare at her in sullen silence. I think his journey to the past made him take on a few of his father's less pleasant characteristics. And he used to be such a sweet boy...

>
 Because I have to have specific items, I'm going on the foraging run today. I don't like leaving Capsule Corporation unguarded, especially considering the delicate stage the project has reached; but just for a short while, I think it will be safe to leave._

>

>

Juuhachi-gou surveyed the stack of items they'd salvaged from the medical warehouse with a vague sense of apprehension. "Bulma, what the hell are you trying to do anyway?" she muttered to herself. Something in her dead memory was being jostled, and she didn't like the feel of it at all.

>
 She walked over to the warehouse again. She had to scale the side of the building to get in through the skylight Trunks had knocked open. Bulma was reading over her clipboard. "I want to take one last look around, and I'll be done," she was saying to her son. "Just carry those back to the skycar, won't you?"

>
 Trunks noted Juuhachi-gou's approach with an icy blue glare. _I'll be back_, his eyes told her with a promise that was almost a guarded threat. He flew off with the stack of crates at almost top speed.

>
 When he was gone, Juuhachi-gou cleared her throat. "Bulma...?"

>
 "Hm?" Bulma ticked off another item on her list. "What is it, Juu-chan?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou blinked at the nickname, but she didn't protest. "If I could ask you a question...?"

>
 She noticed Bulma stiffening and immediately her instincts were confirmed. _She's hiding something. From her son, and from me_.

"About what?" Bulma asked, regaining her composure.

>
 "About what we're doing here. The supplies we're gathering. They're very specific."

>
 "I'm running low, that's all." Bulma was speaking very quickly and brightly, with obviously forced briskness. She walked away towards the half-demolished portion of the warehouse, pretending to look for something.

>
 Juuhachi-gou followed her, unwilling to let the subject drop. "On saline solution? Growth hormones? Liquid nutrients? There's no reason you'd need any of that, unless--"

>
 Bulma turned on her, ready to defend herself vigorously. "I just need those things, that's all!" she said hotly. "There's no need to go into detail about--"
>
 She broke off into a scream as Juuhachi-gou charged at her.

>

>

"_Trunks_--!!!!"

>
 His mother's desperate cry made Trunks drop the crates and turn around. "Kaa-san?"

>
 A faint rumble sounded from the warehouse, and before his eyes, the building collapsed on itself.

>
 "_KAA-SAAAAAAN!!!" Trunks flew through the rising cloud of dust and began digging wildly through the debris. He couldn't find her. She wasn't where he'd last seen her. "Kaa-san! Answer me!!!" She couldn't be dead, not his mother, not after all he'd done to protect her, please--

>
 A faint coughing drew his attention, and he began digging afresh in another location. "Kaa-san? Can you hear me?"

>
 More coughing; then, faintly, "...trunks...help..."

>
 He redoubled his efforts and found a denim-clad leg. Within seconds, he had uncovered both his mother and Juuhachi-gou. What he saw made his blood freeze.

>
 The cyborg was on top of his mother, her knees and elbows braced firmly on what was left of the floor. Bulma moved, coughing and blinking; Juuhachi-gou didn't. A large section of the reinforced roof had fallen on top of them, and Juuhachi-gou had taken the brunt of the impact; otherwise, Bulma would have been instantly crushed.

>
 Trunks could only stare for the longest time; his heart couldn't accept what his eyes were seeing, what his brain was telling him must have happened.

>
 Bulma pulled herself up as much as she could under Juuhachi-gou's dead weight. There was blood all over the red CC coveralls, but none of it was hers. She'd sustained a few scrapes and bruises, nothing more. "I think she's still alive," Bulma coughed. "We've got to get her back home quickly."

>
 He didn't move.

>
 "Trunks!!" Bulma shouted at him. "Juuhachi-gou saved my life. She must have heard the building getting ready to fall. We've got to help her!" she snapped when he still did nothing. "I know you want her to die, but I'll be damned if I let it happen." She tried to pull herself out from under Juuhachi-gou's dead weight again, without success. "I'll carry her home on my back if I have to..."

>
 Stiffly Trunks bent and scooped the limp cyborg up effortlessly in his arms. He flew off to the car without a word. Bulma jumped up, dusted herself off as best she could, and ran after him.

>
 Not a word was spoken on the trip back. Trunks was still holding Juuhachi-gou's limp body, looking into her expressionless face. His mother's words kept coming back to him: Juuhachi-gou saved my life...I know you want her to die, but I'll be damned if I let it happen. Juuhachi-gou saved my life..._

>
 He thought if he looked at the Jinzouningen's still face long enough, maybe he would understand why she'd done such a thing.

>

>

It was almost dark before Juuhachi-gou finally opened her eyes. She lay in the examination bed, her torso and head swathed in bandages, and blinked at the overhead light a few times.

>
 "How are you feeling?" Bulma asked her.

>
 The pale eyes cut over to her. "I'm fine. What about you?"

>
 Bulma rubbed idly at the mouse under her left eye. "I'll live. Thanks to you."

>
 "Why did you do it?" Trunks interrupted. Juuhachi-gou looked at him; he stood by the door, leaning against the wall, staring at her with his arms folded.

>
 "Trunks," Bulma warned him.

>
 He ignored her. Again, just as his father would have done. "Why did you save my mother? What did you have to gain by risking your existence for a human's?"

>
 Bulma drew in a breath to launch into a tirade of righteous anger in Juuhachi-gou's defense, but she was cut off by the cyborg's casual response. "Enough. I can't take this anymore."

>
 "What?" Bulma gasped.

>
 Juuhachi-gou sat up, removing the bandages from her healed scalp wound. "I have nothing to prove to you, Trunks. I like your mother, and I even like you, but you'll never trust me." She frowned at herself. "I don't even think I can trust myself. If what you say is true, maybe someday I _will_ freak out and start killing again."

>
 "That's not going to happen," Bulma reassured her, with a glare at her son.

>
 "We don't know that for sure." Juuhachi-gou got up and grabbed her clothes from a chair. "I've got to get out of here. I can't stay. I'm sorry."

>
 "Juuhachi-gou, wait!" But she was out the door and gone before the words were out of Bulma's mouth. "Kuso! Trunks, whyever didn't you stop her?"

>
 "Was I supposed to?"

>
 "Oh, for Dende's sake! _Baka_! Go after her! If she's upset, there's no telling what she might do!"

>
 Trunks nodded. "You're right." He turned and left, his face taking on a terrible grin.

>
 It dawned on Bulma that Trunks would be a hell of a lot more likely to blast Juuhachi-gou into metallic dust than try to reason with her--but he was already gone, well out of earshot, too late to call him back. "Oi, oi..." She collapsed into the chair. "What have I done...?"

>

>

Trunks quickly caught sight of Juuhachi-gou; instead of confronting her, he followed her at a safe distance to see what she would do. She didn't seem to be heading anywhere specific, and she was on foot; but

she wouldn't tire out, and he couldn't fly after her forever.

>
 About an hour later she stopped, a few miles away from Capsule Corporation, in what used to be Pepper Town. Trunks touched down behind her, watching her narrowly. The last time he'd set foot in this place, Juuhachi-gou and her brother had just finished trashing it and killing everyone who lived there. He was having a hard time, now, connecting those events to the woman in front of him.

>
 She wandered from place to place, taking everything in. Some of the building structures were still recognizable; others were little more than iron girder skeletons, twisted and warped out of their original shape. From time to time she touched a shattered piece of stonework, scowling slightly. She stopped before the facade of a church that still stood despite the fact that the rest of the structure had long since collapsed. Half the cross surmounted the building, but the ornate inset of stained glass had miraculously survived. Beneath years of dust and grime, the milk-glass representation of a dove descended from a beam of heavenly light, bearing a cluster of olive leaves in its beak.

>
 "I did this," she said without turning around, the first indication that she'd been aware of Trunks' presence the whole time.

>
 "You and Juunana-gou," Trunks confirmed.

>
 "I don't remember. I don't remember any of it."

>
 "It won't do any good to be sorry about it now."

>
 "No, it won't. It won't bring these people back to life."

>
 He came up behind her and stopped. He watched her very carefully. Her back was still to him. He couldn't see her face, and he could read nothing from the set of her shoulders. "Would you do it again?" he asked, a little surprised to hear himself echo his mother's earlier words.

>
 "I don't know." A deep sigh. "And that scares the hell out of me."

>
 "Hn?!" Trunks started back, blinking.

>
 "Can I ever live as a normal person? Will there always be the chance that I might suddenly decide to kill every human in sight? What if my memories come back and I remember why I was a killer in the first place? What then?" A funny little catch in her voice broke off her words.

>
 It wasn't possible. Without thinking, Trunks put a hand on her shoulder to turn her around. "Oi," he offered, "_doushitano_...?"

>
 With a sound that could only have been a choked-off sob, Juuhachi-gou turned around. He caught a glimpse of tears in her eyes before she pressed her face against his chest. "I'm afraid," she said. He could feel her trembling. "If I become a monster again, you'll have to kill me, and this time you'll make sure I'm dead. I know that, I accept that, I don't want to kill...but I don't want to die."

>
 For a moment, Trunks couldn't move, couldn't think. She could've killed him where he stood--snapped his spine, reached up and torn his head off, drawn back and blasted him into oblivion--and he would have been incapable of defending himself. His mind refused to accept the fact that the woman who ravaged his world, who killed his father, who killed his teacher and his best friend, who nearly killed him, was sobbing against him as though her heart were breaking.

>
 He brought his arms up as though they were made of lead and put first one, then the other, around her thin, trembling shoulders. Her

arms locked around his waist, and they simply stood like that for a long time, while the last rays of the dying sun faded around them.

>

>

**Part Two:

> "Holding On and On Till We Believe"

>

_And I'm sucked in by the wonder and I'm sucked up by the lies
> And I dig a hole to climb in and I build some wings to fly
 And
I think that I could love you 'cause you know how to be free
> I want you to come walk this world with me
>

>

_Bulma's Journal, 267 days after Cell:

>
 Well, finally there's a little peace in this house. I don't know what went on between them, but for the past few weeks Trunks and Juuhachi-gou have actually been mostly civil to each other. Today Trunks even invited Juu-chan to spar with him. I thought she was going to faint. It does make a certain amount of sense, though; Juu-chan is the only one left who can hope to give Trunks a half-decent workout.

>
 It's a reasonable assumption to make that all the surviving humans have been accounted for. More managed to conceal themselves from Cell's final rampage than I had first hoped, but there are still less than sixty thousand people left on the entire planet. Less than one percent of Earth's population before the Jinzouningen came. _

>

>

The pair circled each other warily, defensive, each looking for any opening in the other's guard. The sky was wide and clear and cloudless, the sun shining high overhead.

>
 Twice Trunks had nearly forgotten to power down his attacks. Both times he'd asked Juuhachi-gou if she wanted to stop, and both times she had encouraged him quietly, without anger, to continue. Whenever Trunks felt the old rage building in him, all he had to do was look in the Jinzouningen's eyes. The look behind them was no longer one of disdain or contempt. There was an animation in that flawlessly beautiful face that had never been there before--that, and a remarkable vulnerability. She was almost impossible to physically harm unless he went all-out with her, but her heart was something

else again. Over the past several weeks, he'd really begun seeing _her_, and not the soulless engine of mass destruction she had once been. _She really is a different person...I don't know if I can ever forgive the terrible things she's done, but I suppose Kaa-san's right--she deserves a second chance just like the rest of us. I wonder if she really does like me...? Bakana! What kind of thinking is that? I'm letting my mind wander. I can't afford to get careless even if this isn't a serious fight._

>
 "Your mother's got a secret."

>
 Juuhachi-gou confirmed Trunks' long-held suspicions with a casual air. He stopped in mid-kata and looked at her. "What?"

>
 "You're wide open!" Juuhachi-gou delivered a kick to Trunks' ribs that made him grunt. He rode the impact back, then came at her again. Ducking past her guard, he grabbed her arm as it came swinging at him.

>
 "I have two hands, _remember?_" Juuhachi-gou shouted as her left fist connected with his jaw.

>
 He snarled and moved behind her, seized her other wrist and twisted her around so that both her arms were pinned at her back. "Nice attempt at distraction," he whispered in her ear. "But I'm afraid you're going to have to do better than that."

>
 She struggled to get leverage and failed. "_Kuso._"

>
 She stopped her struggles, but he didn't immediately let go of her. He bent his head so his nose was almost touching hers and smiled gently. "Would you like to learn how to fly?"

>
 Her face lit up and she drew back with a sudden delighted smile. "You mean you're finally going to teach me?"

>
 "The same way Gohan taught me. Are you ready?"

>
 "Sure, I guess so--oh-h!!_" Juuhachi-gou gasped as Trunks took off straight up with her. In a handful of heartbeats Capsule Corporation was an insignificant speck far below them, Hope City clearly visible to their left. Beyond that, the shattered horizon stood stark in the noonday sun, corpses of once-thriving cities scattered across the windswept wasteland.

>
 Trying not to look too hard at the ruins, Juuhachi-gou hung helplessly from Trunks unrelenting grip. "Okay, we're airborne. Now what?"

>
 "Now this." He let her drop.

>
 Juuhachi-gou screamed and clawed at the air as she fell.

"Trunks! _Nande yo?!?!?!_"

>
 He put on a burst of speed and effortlessly caught up with her rapid descent. "Now, _fly!_" he shouted over the rush of wind between them.

>
 "_HOW?!_"

>
 "Just _do it!_"

>
 "I don't know how!"

>
 "You've got about ten seconds to figure it out!"

>
 Juuhachi-gou looked at the ground that was rushing up to meet them and gulped. The fall might not kill her, but she was willing to lay odds that it would hurt. A lot.

>
 Something _clicked_ in the back of her mind, and suddenly she took a sharp turn bare inches above the ground. The slipstream burst made small animals scatter as she curved up into the air, laughing.

"_Yatta!_" she cheered. "_Yosh!!!_ Trunks, I take back most of the incredibly nasty things I was just thinking about you!" Effortlessly she pirouetted through the air, arms outspread. "This is wonderful! How could I have _ever_ forgotten this? it's so _easy!_"

>
 "It's only easy once you figure out how to throw yourself at the ground and miss." Trunks pulled up alongside her, watching with a

small, remote smile. "Not bad. It took me weeks to learn. Gohan had to keep catching me. Every time he would leave it a little later, though...there were times I wondered if he'd get to me before I hit the ground." He looked away, studying the cloudless blue sky with eyes of a similar color.

>
 Juuhachi-gou looked at his face. "You really miss him."

>
 "_Hai,_" he nodded.

>
 "I'm sorry. I know it's not worth much, but..."

>
 "...Wakatta._ I understand." He hoped she realized how much it cost him to say that to her.

>
 "I hope someday that I'll understand too."

>
 She touched down on the roof and sat, staring out at the wasted landscape. He landed beside her, crouching. "What do you mean, my mother's keeping secrets?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou blinked. "She is," she said after a moment.

"And... I think I know what part of it has to do with. Maybe all of it."

>
 Trunks drew back a little, cocked his head to one side. "How do you think you know that?"

>
 "Think about the things she sent us after this morning."

Juuhachi-gou lifted a hand, began ticking things off in the air.

"Saline solution. Growth hormones. Liquid nutrients. Electronic equipment that can be converted to use as temperature or fluid feed regulators." She paused. "If you wanted to grow your own people..."

>
 "_Su-sugoi! _Masaka_" Trunks gasped. "Are you saying that my mother's growing Jinzouningen?!"

>
 "Maybe." Juuhachi-gou looked at him. "Think about it. The human race is staggering, ready to topple. There may not be enough people to repopulate the planet. So she's trying to re-stock. If she can grow artificial humans, like...me, then they can be raised as normal people. They can marry and interbreed, and maybe the human race will be strengthened enough from the infusion of 'new blood' to carry on."

>
 "Ah!" Trunks sat down in mid-air. "Kaa-san... I can't believe it, but... it makes so much sense." He looked up. "But why hasn't she told us?"

>
 Juuhachi-gou shrugged. "It's very exacting work. I seem to remember Gero spending days locked up in his labs, monitoring the whole process constantly. Wherever Bulma got her information, it can't be complete. She's probably not sure it's going to work, and didn't want to raise our hopes."

>
 "But you could help."

>
 "_Nani_"

>
 "What little you recall might fill in her gaps. We should talk to her."

>
 Slowly Juuhachi-gou nodded. "Maybe. It would be worth trying, I suppose. Nothing's lost if it turns out she knows everything I know already."

>
 "_Sou na_" Trunks stepped off the roof into midair. "Let's unload the skycar and go talk to Kaa-san."

>
 "_Hai_" Juuhachi-gou took off after him, already accustomed to the concept of flight.

>

>

Bulma rubbed her aching eyes and put her head down on her arms for a moment. The latest figures in from the Badlands were a little more encouraging than last month's, but not much. Human civilization was pulling itself up by its bootstraps, but its grip on those selfsame straps was none too steady. Right now, Capsule Corporation, and Hope City, were probably the only places on Earth where things were almost as they'd been before Gero's madness had overwhelmed them all. Everything else was more or less still under 'disaster' conditions, and in some places, the rumors went, some of the less appealing portions of society had taken over. Dictatorships, miniature armies on the march, anarchists, outlaws roaming the countryside... it was so much to have to worry about.

>
 Sitting up again, Bulma opened a desk drawer and pulled out a battered photo. One of Gokou's little snapshots--he'd loved taking pictures--but this one wasn't one of his usual little hentai collection. She hardly remembered, now, when and where it'd been taken, but the subjects were clear enough. Vegeta, in a rare moment of playfulness; herself, thrown up over his shoulder, caught in the act of screaming and pounding on him in protest as he smirked.

>
 That was... right before I knew I was pregnant, I think. We'd been sleeping together for a little while, and you considered me all yours, didn't you, Vegeta? And me? I was still holding out as hard as I could to avoid committing myself to you. But it wasn't any good. I knew it even then. You were everything I wanted...someone strong enough to stand up to me, strong enough to make me listen, but not break me. We fought so hard... we loved harder.

>
 The picture blurred, and Bulma blinked furiously, trying to stave off the tears. "I never realized until you were gone how much of me you'd take with you when you died," she said aloud. "You arrogant, overconfident, smug son of a... Whoever said time heals all wounds never knew you." She pressed the picture to her chest, letting the slow tears fall where they would.

>
 "Kaa-san?"

>
 Bulma jerked up straight and hastily swabbed at her eyes, not wanting Trunks to see her crying. "_Hai_", Trunks-kun. I'm in the lab," she called back.

>
 In a few minutes Trunks and Juuhachi-gou walked in, carrying several crates between them. "Just set them over there," Bulma said, waving a hand. "I'll unpack later."

>
 "_Hai_." Setting down the boxes, Trunks straightened. "Kaa-san, we need to talk to you."

>
 "So? About what?"

>
 Trunks folded his arms. "I... I'm not meaning to pry, but...Juuhachi-gou says she thinks you're... you're growing people."

>
 Bulma gasped, caught off-guard. She stared at Juuhachi-gou and Trunks in turn, then slowly relaxed. "I might've known you'd figure it out," she said quietly to Juuhachi-gou.

>
 "It took me a while," the girl replied, "but this last load cinched it for me. These chemicals--" she waved a hand at the boxes they'd brought in. "You could make a hell of a lot of concentrate liquid nutrient from this. Enough to support a small army of human embryos as they incubated."

>
 "I suppose it's time to explain, then." Bulma slid out of her chair and crossed to a blank wall of the lab, slid open a hidden panel, and keyed in a code on the number pad she'd revealed. A concealed door hissed open, and faint bleeps, clicks and gurgles emanated from the opening, along with a dim, ghostly light. Bulma

turned and beckoned Trunks and Juuhachi-gou to follow her, walked into the secret room.

>
 As he walked in after his mother, Trunks looked around curiously. Rows upon rows upon banks of instruments, the whole thing having the familiar feel of his mother's handiwork; some pieces bodged in from other machines she'd dismantled or never finished, some whole and obviously a unit. He even recognized some pieces of the time machine, cannibalized...for what?

>
 In the center of the room stood four tall tubes, nearly perfectly opaque, partly due to the dark--glass? plastic?-- they were constructed of, partly due to the dim lighting. In each one Trunks could just make out, if he looked hard enough, a form, roughly humanoid. Three of them were still fairly small, perhaps the size of a teenaged child; the other seemed to be taller and broader, the size of a grown man. All four had a faint cobalt aura around them, and if he listened Trunks could hear a low hum, sense a field of energy encapsulating each tank.

>
 "You are cloning humans," Juuhachi-gou said, her voice holding a note of grudging wonder.

>
 "No." Bulma shook her head. "I could never get that far."

>
 "Then, what-?"

>
 Bulma walked over to the first tube, gestured at it. "Piccolo," she said quietly. Moving to the next, she nodded at it. "Gohan." The third in line. "Gokou." Then to the last, and here she paused, looking at it, hands creeping up to clasp in front of her chest. "Vegeta."

>
 "NANDE KUSO_?!" Trunks half-shouted, then caught himself.

"Gomen, Kaa-san, but--how--why--what!!"

>
 Bulma turned with a wry little smile. "Perfect Cell."

>
 "Who?" Juuhachi-gou said, even as Trunks blanched.

>
 "Gero's final creation. I don't expect you remember the name. It was just plain 'Cell' at first. A completely organic being who was specifically designed to absorb all the artificial humans and by doing so become the perfect fighter." Bulma sighed and sat down near the incubation tubes. "It emerged a few years ago and decimated half the populace, looking for you and Juunana-gou. Of course, by that time, you were... well..."

>
 "Dead," Juuhachi-gou said calmly.

>
 "I was going to say 'out of his reach', but..."

>
 "Don't candy-coat, Bulma. I can't let it bother me. So what did this 'Cell' do after that?"

>
 "Kaa-san built a time machine," Trunks said quietly. "She sent me back in time to give Gokou-san some special medicine. He caught a virus, you see, and it killed him."

>
 "Nobody knew it at the time, but this virus weakened his heart. One day he just...dropped." Bulma drew a deep breath. "I thought, perhaps, if I sent Trunks back to keep Gokou from dying, it would change everything. Instead, it created an alternate timeline where Gokou didn't have a heart attack. I guess I should've realized time wouldn't let me create a paradox like that. What I also didn't know is that Cell stowed away and went back in time with Trunks, where he absorbed that Juunana-gou and Juuhachi-gou, thereby becoming Perfect Cell. He almost destroyed the world, but they managed to defeat him, mostly due to Gohan-kun."

>
 "So." Juuhachi-gou nodded. "And then Trunks came back here."

>
 "Yes. And killed Cell in our timeline too. But something Trunks told me about Perfect Cell gave me an idea. I went to Gero's old lab--"

>
 "Kaa-san!" Trunks clenched his fists. "You didn't. That place is dangerous!"

>
 "_Hai_, I know. It caved in on me. I only barely got out in time. It was picked almost clean--looters, I suppose--but I did find Gero's notebooks, at least the ones describing the biological incubation process he used to create Juu, her brother, and Cell."

>
 "So you tried to use that technology to grow clones of the warriors?" Juuhachi-gou asked, circling the tanks thoughtfully. "Why just the Saiyajin? And where'd you get the tissue samples from? That was a little long ago, wasn't it?"

>
 "From Cell," Trunks whispered. "He was created using samples of all of them... Krillin, Piccolo, Yamucha, Tenshinhan, Gokou... tou-san. Gero spent years collecting those. He wanted to create something powerful enough to destroy Gokou-san utterly, and everything he cared about. He _hated_ _Gokou_, didn't he, Kaa-san?"

>
 Bulma nodded, looked at her son. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier, Trunks, but I had no idea if it would work at all, and I didn't want to get your hopes up over what was at that point almost an impossible task. When you killed Cell in our time, I took samples from him. The purely human components didn't survive... but Perfect Cell, you told me, boasted at one point that a Saiyajin's cells grow stronger when they face death. I thought, if that were so, then maybe--maybe--those cells would still be alive. And they were. So were Piccolo's."

>
 "But what good does this do?" Juuhachi-gou waved a hand. "If I'm reading these meters right, you have _no_ conscious brain activity. They're mindless."

>
 "They have to be." Bulma straightened. "Earth has a new guardian, remember--Namek sent Dende the healer here after Kami-sama and Piccolo were killed. I'm sure now that things have settled down he's had time to create his own set of Dragonballs. My plan is to find them and wish the _souls_ of Son-kun, Gohan-kun, Piccolo-san and Vegeta into these bodies--once the bodies are mature, I mean."

>
 "_AH_!" Trunks' face lit up. "Kaa-san! _Sugoi_! Of course! You can't wish them back from the dead any more, but wishing them reincarnated might not count! Is that it?"

>
 "That's what I'm hoping. I used the time machine to create a bubble of 'fast time' around each tube. Time is passing faster in there than out here, which is why the clones are so close to being fully grown now. I thought that would be safer than trying to accelerate their growth and maturation with chemicals-- so much of what Gero did is out of my league. I'm much more familiar with machines and electronics than I am with biology."

>
 Juuhachi-gou walked over and stood in front of Bulma. "Bulma... not that I remember it, but...I take back everything I ever might've said about humans being stupid."

>
 "Hm? _Nani_?" Bulma blinked at Juuhachi-gou.

>
 "For you to think of this, and pull it off..." Juuhachi-gou jerked her chin back in the direction of the tubes. "That's more than smart; that's genius. If the human race produced you, it's not nearly as much of a waste of space as I apparently used to think it was."

>
 Moving closer to the tanks again, Trunks peered in. "This is Piccolo? The biggest one?"

>
 "Yes. I started with him first. Namekians have an inborn ability to regenerate themselves, and I figured he'd be good practice for the others. As you see, he's grown even faster than the others."

Tomorrow, or the next day, I was going to call you in and explain all this anyway, so I could ask your help in finding the Dragon Balls. Once Piccolo's new body finished maturing, I planned to switch the time field on his tank over to a stasis' setting and hold him in hibernation till the others caught up, then wish them all back at once--" Bulma broke off as a quiet chime began to sound. "_Nani_?!?" She jumped up and ran to a bank of controls.

>
 "What's wrong?" Juuhachi-gou asked.

>
 "That-- this can't be. The sensors indicate a sudden surge of activity in the higher brain centers." Bewildered, Bulma looked from displays to tanks and back again. "If I didn't know better, I'd swear he was waking--"

>
 At that second, with a cascade of shattering glass and fluid, a green fist rammed its way through the side of the tube. Trunks instantly snatched his sword off his back and took a ready position between the tanks and his mother; Juuhachi-gou balled her fists and dropped into a defensive crouch.

>
 Another scream of shattering glass and bending metal, and a form launched itself at Juuhachi-gou, grabbing her up and rocketing for the ceiling, then slamming through it using her as a battering ram of sorts. With a shout Trunks flew up after the pair while Bulma darted out the door, running out into the front courtyard of Capsule Corporation and peering upwards.

>
 High above, Juuhachi-gou and Piccolo were trading blows, with the cyborg getting the worse of it; she seemed to be trying to hold back, but the same couldn't be said of the Namekian. Sheathing his sword, Trunks halted in mid-air, drew a deep breath, focused his ki, and let the air out in a rising shout: "_AhhhHHHHHHHAAAAA_!" Instantly energy exploded up his body and his hair spiked, flushing gold; his eyes lost their pupils and turned an intense cobalt and his entire frame grew subtly larger to contain the power he'd called up.

>
 Once the transformation to Super-Saiyajin was finished, Trunks darted in and grabbed Piccolo from behind, trying to put him in a full nelson while shouting, "Piccolo-san! _Dame DA_! _Yamero_!!!"

>
 "Whoever the hell you are, you'd better let go of me," Piccolo snarled back.

>
 "Not on your life!"

>
 "Fine__ You're asking for it, boy. And I'm just the one to give it to you." Abruptly Piccolo flipped himself forward in mid-air. Trunks' hands slipped on the Namekian's still-damp skin and he pitched off, catching himself in mid-fall and whirling to face Piccolo again.

>
 In the second of silence that followed as they sized each other up, Bulma's voice could be heard from below: "_PICCOLO!! KONO YAROU! Ima YAMERO_!!!"

>
 "Huh?" Piccolo glanced down, eyes widening a bit. "Bulma. Damn, is that you?"

>
 "'Who do you _think _it is, _baka_!? Kaiou-sama in drag?!?' _Chikusho_!!!"

>
 The Namekian blinked; chuckled. "Yeah, that's you all right. Foul-mouthed as ever." He glanced up at Trunks, then scowled. "Wait a second. You're Saiyajin. And that aura..." he put his head to one side. "You're Vegeta's son, aren't you? Trunks, right?"

>
 "_Hai_."

>
 "Then what're you doing defending _her_?" One green arm leveled at Juuhachi-gou, who folded her arms and raised an eyebrow, unconcerned. "She killed your dad, hot shot, along with a lot of other people. Me included."

>
 "That was then. This is now. She's on our side."
>
 "You sure about that?"
>
 "Sure enough to keep you from killing her. If I can't kill her, neither can you."
>
 "_Oi--!_" Juuhachi-gou protested sharply.
>
 Piccolo laughed. "Smart mouthed. I like that." He looked at Juuhachi-gou. "Okay. It's a truce."
>
 "Good." Juuhachi-gou smirked. "That means I don't have to kick your round ass square."
>
 "You're welcome to try, anytime." Piccolo let himself drift downwards to the ground; Trunks and Juuhachi-gou followed. "This is beginning to get old," she muttered as they landed. "Am I going to get this reception from _all _of these people?"
>
 Trunks winced. "Probably."
>
 "Wonderful." Juuhachi-gou shoved a stray lock of hair back. "At least you and the Jolly Green Escargot over there aren't holding grudges."
>
 "Remind me sometime to tell you how I started out knowing these people," Piccolo said over one shoulder with a mocking half-grin. "Now then, Bulma. Two questions. One, what's going on. Two, where are my clothes."
>
 "Oh well you're _welcome_," Bulma said sharply, planting her fists on her hips. "I'm so glad to hear you're happy to be alive again. As long as we're asking questions, what are you doing back in your body? I hadn't even wished--"
>
 "Wouldn't have done you any good if you had. Shenlon has no jurisdiction over the dead when it's been longer than a year, remember? Besides which, there aren't any Dragonballs right now. Dende hasn't recreated them. He was summoned from Namek when I died, and he was nowhere near ready. He has the ability to create the Dragonballs, but not the skill."
>
 Bulma's face fell. "That means..." she faltered, and fell silent, turning her face away.
>
 An odd expression crossed the Namekian's features; he reached out, almost hesitantly, then put a hand on Bulma's shoulder. "Don't worry," he added, voice softer. "You haven't wasted your time. Now I understand why Dende's been walking around for a while trying not to smile every time he saw the four of us. He knows what you're up to."

>
 "That still doesn't explain how you returned," Trunks said.

>
 "Easy, hot shot. Namekians regenerate. Soon as our bodies restore themselves, no matter how long it's been, our spirits are automatically drawn back to them." Piccolo shrugged. "As for Gokou and the others, I've got a feeling Enma-sama is about to get the talking-to of his life..."
>

>

High above in Heaven, Dende opened his eyes and smiled. He was very young for a Namek-jin, the guardian of a dying world...he knew how the rest of his race regarded him. Any of the others would have abandoned Earth long ago as a lost cause.
>
 Dende didn't believe in lost causes.
>
 "_Okaerinasai,_ Piccolo-san," he whispered.
>
 "What is it, God?" the small, round black figure at Dende's

side asked.

>
 "We're about to have company, Mr. Popo," Dende answered. The young Kami-sama lifted his head, watching as three small dots in the sky resolved themselves into figures which swooped in and landed. "Gokou-san, Gohan-san, Vegeta-san," he said. "It's good of you to visit me."

>
 "Never mind your damn pleasantries," Vegeta all but snarled. "Where the hell is Piccolo?"

>
 "Ah, Kami-sama, Piccolo disappeared a few minutes ago," Gohan added hastily, trying to offset Vegeta's less than perfect manners.

>
 Gokou nodded agreement. "We were wondering if maybe you knew what had happened?"

>
 "Oh yes." Dende turned, strolled a few feet along the edge of his world, looking down in the direction of Earth. "He's alive again."

>
 "_Nani_?" Gokou's eyes opened. "How'd _that _happen?" He scratched his head. "Can't be the Dragonballs."

>
 "And when it is _our _turn?" Vegeta added, taking a step forward.

>
 Dende turned with a gentle little smile. "All in good time, Vegeta-san," he said mildly. "All in good time."

>
 "To _HELL AND DAMNATION _with your 'all in good time'!" The Saiyajin Prince took another step, to be restrained by his two companions. "Tell us! What are you up to?!? What game is this you're playing?!"

>
 Dende only looked back over the edge. "You have a very determined and resourceful woman, Vegeta-san..."

>
 "Bulma!" Gokou broke into laughter. "_Haaaai! _ Yooooosh!"

>
 "Bulma-san!" Gohan's face lit up.

>
 "Bulma," Vegeta echoed in a whisper, and turned to look down towards the Earth as well. "This, this is her doing?"

>
 "Worlds, stars, even the gods, all come and go," Dende said, starting to walk towards his palace, then stopping just abreast of the trio to look at them each in turn. "The only thing that endures is love." A faint breeze stirred his robes. "Be patient, Vegeta-san. This is Bulma's fight, and mine too. You must trust us to win." His eyes grew distant. "Soon you will go into battle again. Terror is moving on the Earth, and a greater darkness is still to come when fear is past." With that, the young Namekian continued into his palace.

>
 "Oi, but, Kami-sama," Gokou called after the departing Dende.

"When _do _we get to leave? I want to see ChiChi again! I haven't had any home cooking for _years_!"

>
 The breeze carried back the answer: "All in good time..."

>

>

**Part Three

> "I'm Not Touched, But I'm Aching To Be"

>

_And it's burning in our fingers and it's burning on the road
> And I like the way you're broken and I'll like you when you're
old
 And I meet you in the garden and I feel you plant the seed

> I want you to come walk this world with me
>

>

_Bulma's Journal, 297 days after Cell:

>
 The experiment seems to be a success. Piccolo revived himself, and he's in perfect health--I guess. I'm certainly not a specialist in Namekian physiology; however, he seems to be his usual gruff, 'lone-wolf' self. --Well, not quite so much of a loner. But then, I'm not quite so afraid of him as I used to be. In fact, I'm finding I'm not really afraid of him at all any more. Respect his power? Certainly. Recognize his prowess as a fighter? Well, naturally! Yet, I remember how nervous I was around him when I was a girl, and even later, after he became an uneasy ally. That nervousness is gone now, I think in part due to the fact that we ARE from 'the old days', before Gero ruined not just our lives but the whole world's. What WAS that man thinking? I still can't imagine the depth of hatred and contempt he must've felt for your group in general and Gokou in particular to create such terrible weapons of war out of good people like Juu-chan.__
>

>

Oddly enough, Piccolo fit right in. He spent most of the daylight hours outside, wandering, meditating, but he would often come back at night to discuss what he'd seen, keeping them abreast of happenings from distant places that the news media no longer reached. His observations, though tart, were honest and insightful, and valuable for that very reason.

>
 Maybe it was the fact they'd been alive together through so much, but he and Bulma grew a little closer each day. Although he didn't know much about the purely scientific side of cloning and regeneration, Piccolo had a great deal of practical firsthand knowledge. Some afternoons he and Bulma would be closeted together in the lab for hours, discussing the progress of the clone bodies and the next step in their cultivation or simply reliving years past. The... friendship?... seemed to do his mother good; some of the darkness Trunks had always seen in her eyes, hide it though she might from anyone else, lifted in the days after Piccolo's resurrection.

>
 Of course, Trunks had known a Piccolo before, in that other world-time, but this one seemed subtly different. Perhaps a bit more open, though certainly no less brusque. It made him wonder what differences he might find, or imagine, in the other warriors.

>
 Most of all, he wondered about his father.

>
 Vegeta hadn't accepted him very well at first, but after their training together in the Room of Spirit and Time, the Saiyajin prince

had held a measure of respect and regard for him. Trunks hadn't been sure exactly to what degree, but there had been some bond between them. Would he and his true father have that, or would they be strangers to one another?

>
 As for Juuhachi-gou, she too seemed to be fitting in, or at least trying to find a niche. She didn't seem to mind being asked to help with manual labor. She never offered her assistance, never once; but if asked, she would carry a line to a dizzying height or transport a burden many times her size without effort or complaint. If the cyborg wasn't exactly radiantly happy, she certainly didn't appear as troubled as she had when she'd first arrived. She sparred daily with Trunks, an activity they both enjoyed. Bulma caught Piccolo watching them at times, and she wondered if he expected Juuhachi-gou to suddenly turn "bad" again. Bulma was confident that such a thing wouldn't happen. Just as she wondered now why she was once so nervous around Piccolo, it was becoming difficult to remember ever having been afraid of Juuhachi-gou.

>
 Until one day in town when the past caught up with the cyborg.

>
 They were loading packages from Hope's market into the back of the skycar when a rock sailed out of nowhere and struck Juuhachi-gou hard on the back of her head. It might have killed an ordinary human; as it was, she lost her balance and dropped the boxes she carried. She snapped into a stance and turned around ready to defend herself.

>
 A young woman, possibly in her early twenties, stood in the roadway. A crowd was gathering behind her, looking on with sudden interest. The woman pointed at Juuhachi-gou and screamed one word: "Jinzouningen!!!"

>
 A ripple of curiosity spread through the crowd. "Jinzouningen?" "But weren't they destroyed?" "Impossible...!"

>
 "Uh-oh," Bulma murmured, reaching behind the driver's seat for her Uzi.

>
 The woman stepped forward, fists clenching. "You killed my father," she spat. "I saw it on television. He was trying to fight you, and you cut him down like he was nothing!"

>
 Juuhachi-gou's expression became a seamless, placid mask. Only her eyes betrayed her, deep and hollow and despairing. Not again...

>
 "I'll never forget that face." The girl swiped back a wild lock of dark hair and took another step forward. "I've seen it in my nightmares ever since I was ten years old."

>
 "I'm...sorry." Juuhachi-gou lowered her hands and stood up straight, lowering her guard. She regarded the girl with an expression of sincere regret. Her voice was quiet, oddly gentle. "I really am. I wasn't--"

>
 "Kono ama! Uso yo_!!" The girl scooped up another rock and threw it in a smooth motion straight at Juuhachi-gou's face.

>
 The cyborg caught it effortlessly and dropped it to the ground. "I'm not going to fight you. Please..."

>
 "I'll make you fight me!" the girl screamed, charging at her. Juuhachi-gou made no effort to dodge and was swiftly borne down to the ground.

>
 "Stop it!!" Bulma rushed in and tried to grab hold of the flailing fists that punched Juuhachi-gou repeatedly in the face and chest. She ended up taking a few glancing blows herself for her trouble. "Trunks! Help!"

>
 Almost immediately a figure flew out of a nearby supply shop and streaked towards the scuffle. Strong hands plucked the girl off of Juuhachi-gou and held her up, kicking and cursing, in midair.

>
 Bulma helped Juuhachi-gou to her feet--not that she needed it. The cyborg was somewhat disheveled but not the least bit hurt.

>
 "What do I do with this?" Trunks asked, looking a bit nervous about holding a strange, struggling girl so close against himself.

>
 "Just keep her from trying to kill Juu!" Bulma barked at him.

>
 "She can't hurt me," Juuhachi-gou pointed out sensibly, but her eyes were sad.

>
 "Juu, hush!--Um...Sorry about that, everyone!" Bulma said in a voice laden with false brightness. "Nothing to be worried about, heh!"

>
 A grizzled middle-aged man nodded at Juuhachi-gou. "So...she's not one of the Jinzouningen who destroyed our world?"

>
 A lighthearted denial sprang to Bulma's mind, but what came out of her mouth was, "Well...yes."

>
 Trunks was so shocked he almost dropped the girl.

"Nanda?!?!?"

>
 "There's no point in lying about it." Bulma surveyed the stunned crowd. "Look, you all know me, you know my son Trunks. We don't have any reason to lie to you, and we're certainly not doing it now. Juuhachi-gou and her brother, Juunana-gou, were normal humans once. They were taken captive by Dr. Gero and made into evil cyborgs. He wanted to use them to take over the world, but something went horribly wrong."

>
 Trunks sensed the edge of panic rising in the crowd and took firm hold of the girl, who was too busy listening to fight him much at the moment. Mom, I hope you know what you're doing. And if not, I hope we can get our things and leave Capsule Corporation in a BIG hurry..._

>
 "Juuhachi-gou is free of Dr. Gero's control now." Bulma put a hand on one narrow shoulder. "She's lived peacefully with us for months."

>
 "How do we know she won't start killing people again?" a voice from the back demanded. The crowd murmured restless agreement.

>
 Juuhachi-gou spoke for herself this time. "Because I don't want to hurt anyone anymore. I never really did; it was the programming Gero put me through. It's gone now. I just want to live an ordinary life. That's all."

>
 "Juuhachi-gou and her brother were the first victims of Dr. Gero's evil." Bulma looked at each of the bystanders in turn. "Like the rest of us, she barely survived."

>
 "It's a lie!" the girl who'd attacked screamed. "She's just waiting till our guard's down, and then she'll kill us all!"

>
 "No, I won't!" Juuhachi-gou responded hotly. "You can't prove a negative. All I can tell you is that if I wanted people dead, I wouldn't have been just lying there letting you beat on me. I hate what was done to me and I hate what it made me do. I can't make up for it. I wouldn't know where to start. I just want to live my life and do what I can to help put things right."

>
 "She's right about one thing," the elder said. "If she wanted us dead, we would be. I suppose that means she's telling the truth about not wanting to kill anyone. And your word's been trustworthy before, Bulma-san."

>
 The tense silence hovering in the thick, hot air like a dust cloud began to shift a bit as the crowd murmured among itself :

"Trust her?" "Bulma's never done anything but help--" "Yeah, but if

that's one of those artificial humans, you know how strong they are--"
"Can we risk it?" "Hey, you wanna fight her?"
>
 Juuhachi-gou looked upwards. "Let her go," she said to Trunks in a tone of weary resignation. "Let her attack me if she wants to. Maybe it will help her somehow. God knows there's nothing else I can do for her."
>
 Trunks lowered to the ground and took his hands away. The girl immediately charged forward and used her momentum to slam Juuhachi-gou against the side of the skycar. Bulma flinched, but didn't interfere.
>
 The girl fisted her hand in Juuhachi-gou's shirt and drew back a fist. Juuhachi-gou just looked at her, a terrible sadness plain in her pale, tilted eyes.
>
 The dark-haired girl was weeping with rage. Trunks understood, and he wanted to tell her so, but he remained silent. Yes, he'd once hated Juuhachi-gou as much as that--as a 13-year-old boy, kneeling in the rain amidst the ruins of the capitol city, cradling Gohan's blasted, lifeless body--but things were different now. How could he explain something like that? He looked again at Juuhachi-gou's face, and he couldn't be certain, but he thought she understood too.

>
 Finally the girl released Juuhachi-gou and stepped back, trembling. "I'll find a way to destroy you, I swear it." She spun on her heel and pushed her way through the crowd and was gone.
>
 Juuhachi-gou watched her walk away with no readable expression. Then she turned around and got in the back of the skycar without a word to Bulma or Trunks. The crowd slowly dispersed, and mother and son climbed into the front seat and drove away. The ride home was silent, because there was nothing to say, really. Juuhachi-gou sat between them, her head bowed, not moving or speaking. Trunks stole glances at her perfect profile from time to time; he wanted to say something, but he couldn't find any words that would offer much comfort. It was just a reaction she would have to expect from time to time.
>
 As they drew up to the front door, Piccolo darted down the stairs like a green streak, cape flying out behind him, expression thunderous. "About damn time," he growled. "Something's happening."

>
 "In the lab?" Bulma asked, eyes widening with alarm.
>
 "On the TV. News broadcast. Special bulletin, just came on. Hurry."
>
 "...repeat myself," the news announcer was saying as they all walked into the main living area. "Reports from the area are sporadic and unsubstantiated, but there has been some sort of assault on the community of Seabreeze, some 150 miles down the coast, earlier this morning. What information we have seems to indicate a single person is responsible for--" he stopped as someone from off-camera shoved a piece of paper at him. "Ah, we have an update from the Seabreeze area."
>
 The screen cut to a fuzzily-photographed home video, the maker of which was obviously in a hurry but trying to make the footage as good as possible; after a moment's initial blurriness and shaking, it steadied and focused on a shape that was streaking across the sky. As it grew nearer, its human proportions could be made out, along with a shock of dark hair that the wind of its--his--passage blew back away from a pale face.
>
 As if seeing the cameraman now, the figure swerved in mid-flight and passed right over, giving the photographer one good, if hasty, closeup opportunity.
>
 Bulma gasped.

>
 Trunks cursed.

>
 Piccolo grunted. "Thought so."

>
 The only one silent was Juuhachi-gou, but her china-blue eyes widened, and she put out a hand to steady herself, shaking her head as if dizzy by something.

>
 The lack of clarity in the video couldn't hide the attacker's identity.

>
 It was Juunana-gou.

>
 "Dammit!" Trunks whirled, headed for the door, ignoring the rest of the broadcast. Only Piccolo's outstretched arm stopped him. "What are you doing? If we move now we can--"

>
 "We can get there in about enough time to declare the place a disaster area," Piccolo grunted back. "Get your brain in gear, hot shot. This all took place this morning, and 150 miles is still not a walk around the block, even flying as fast as we can. If that cyborg had any smarts, he'd be long gone."

>
 "Piccolo-san's right," Bulma agreed, twisting to look back at them. "Oi, Juu-chan? Are you all right?"

>
 "Ha-_hai_." The slender young woman drew herself up. "I agree with Piccolo. It makes sense to hit fast, do as much damage as you can, then run. But we should still go there, if only to make sure. He might have left a clue as to his next destination."

>
 "Okay. You two take off. You ought to be able to handle him between you. I'll stick close here and see what else they've got to say." As he spoke, Piccolo cut his eyes to the left, tipping his head slightly that way too, silently indicating Bulma. Trunks nodded once, understanding the unspoken addition: _Somebody's gotta keep an eye on the lab and your Mom._

>
 As they flew out, Trunks looked at Juuhachi-gou. "Are you all right?"

>
 "Don't ask stupid questions," the Jinzouningen snapped, then looked away. "No.... sorry. I feel... disoriented. Something about seeing--" she stopped, shook her head again. "Let's not talk about him. Let's just stop him."

>
 "_Hai_." Trunks put on an extra burst of speed.

>
 When they got to Seabreeze, Trunks halted mid-air, Juuhachi-gou beside him, and stared down. It looked as if a major earthquake had hit it, combined with several tornadoes and at least one tsunami. Slowly he shook his head. "_Masaka_...."

>
 "He did this?" Juuhachi-gou whispered, drifting closer. "I can't..." she trailed off, eyes hooded.

>
 "Believe it. You've seen this handiwork before, remember?"

>
 "I remember, but...somehow it didn't seem so _real_ before. The other cities have always been like they were, but now..."

Juuhachi-gou studied the wrecked town below for a long moment.

"Trunks..."

>
 "_Hai_?"

>
 "I think... I'm finally starting to understand why this hits you and your mother so hard." Juuhachi-gou nodded down at the rubble below. "This wasn't necessary, was it. These people were no threat to Juunana-gou. He... just wanted to do it, that's all."

>
 "_Sou da_." That's right."

>
 For a long time the female Jinzouningen was quiet. Finally she said, "Let's find him now." She looked up at Trunks solemnly. "But when we do... can you give me a minute to talk to him?"

>
 "_Nanda_?!"

>
 "I want to try and make him understand. He's my _brother_--my twin. Even if he won't listen...I want to ask him why. Why he wanted to destroy everything that meant something to these people."

Juuhachi-gou folded her arms around herself. "So that I can know why I wanted to, maybe... and be sure I won't feel like that again."

>
 Trunks looked out over the ocean, the wind kicking up locks of his violet hair.

>
 "It's possible that he may just be operating on automatics--like I was, when I first revived." Juuhachi-gou's tone was almost pleading now, begging for understanding. "He was always more...violent than I was, wasn't he? If there's any chance to reason with him..."

>
 Trunks looked at her, his eyes cold and steady. "You'll get your chance to talk. One chance. If he doesn't listen, he's dead. We can't afford to play around; he's too dangerous."

>
 "Hn. " Juuhachi-gou nodded once, more in acknowledgment than agreement. "Come on. We have a long hunt ahead of us."

>
 They spiraled out in a search pattern, looking for any sign of Juunana-gou's passage. There was virtually nothing to go on; the ruined village behind them, the wide expanse of coast and sea around them, yielded no clues. At last, just as Trunks was ready to call it quits, he spied something ahead of them: a flash of motion near the ground, no more. He held up a hand, and Juuhachi-gou slowed, turning as he indicated the area. "See anything? Feel anything?" he asked.

>
 She narrowed her eyes, scanning the area Trunks had pointed out, instinctively bringing the magnification and motion sensitivity of her artificial eyes up to max. A form blurred through the woods, obviously trying to avoid being seen, but she got a fix on it immediately. "Trunks. Someone's down there."

>
 Trunks looked in the direction she was pointing just in time to see a form explode from cover and rocket straight up at him. He twisted aside barely in time to avoid a punch aimed at his head with enough force to rip it off.

>
 The figure arced in mid-air and paused, smirking down at him, and Trunks felt the old familiar rage rise up in him. "Juunana-gou," he snarled, one hand reaching back to draw his sword.

>
 "Juunana-gou," echoed Juuhachi-gou, moving a bit nearer. "It's me--it's Juuhachi-gou. Your...your sister. Don't you know me?"

>
 Juunana-gou looked at her with the same mocking expression, then turned his attention back to Trunks.

>
 "Juunana-gou, listen to me," Juuhachi-gou tried again. "We need to talk--" she broke off as the other Jinzouningen raised a hand and fired a ki blast at Trunks, who dipped under it, then flew at his attacker. "Chikusho! Trunks! Matte yo!"

>
 "Can't you see he doesn't have any interest in talking?!"

Trunks yelled, blade swinging and cutting the air over Juunana-gou's head as the cyborg ducked, one fist lashing back. Trunks blocked and slashed again. Juunana-gou moved, but not quite quick enough; the sword drew an arc across his chest that rapidly turned red. For a moment the artificial human glanced down at the cut, then focused his attentions once more on Trunks, completely ignoring Juuhachi-gou.

>
 With a hiss of irritation Juuhachi-gou dove at her twin, grabbed him from behind in a full nelson. "Bakamono! Pay attention to me! Stop this now! We don't have to kill humans anymore! We hate Gero for what he did to us, and we hated ordinary humans because we could never be like them again. Well, Gero's dead, and we can live like normal people. We can. Stop fighting! Trunks isn't our enemy anymore. Will you just this once listen to me?! Yamero!!!"

>
 Juunana-gou refused to answer--at least verbally. His muscles flexed as he tried to power his way out of Juuhachi-gou's grip, gaze remaining on Trunks, as if she were no more than a moment's distraction, not worth his consideration.

>
 "Juu, let go of him!" Trunks roared, backing away a bit and circling as the two struggled, trying to find a place to strike at Juunana-gou without hitting Juuhachi-gou.

>
 "Not--before--he answers me--" she panted stubbornly, locking down a little tighter. Suddenly Juunana-gou ceased struggling, then flipped over so his back was towards the ground and dove at full speed. Juuhachi-gou tried to stop him, but his momentum was just a little too much to overcome; they hit hard, with her taking the brunt of the fall and the force of another body slamming into hers. Juunana-gou wrenched himself out of her arms, immediately snapped his hands forward and fired another blast at Trunks.

>
 Trunks answered with a power dive of his own and a scream that seemed too loud and long for any one set of vocal chords to form. Gold fire blazed up through his hair and spiked it out as he shifted to Super-Saiyajin, the power singing in him as he levelled out only a few feet above the ground and shot past Juunana-gou's side in a blur of motion.

>
 The male Jinzouningen sneered at him, then paused, face going blank. Slowly the top half and the bottom half of Juunana-gou's body fell in different directions, sliced by a sword strike too fast to be seen or felt. Now it was Trunks' turn to smirk as he sheathed his sword and landed, his hair returning to its normal shade and flattening again.

>
 "_Chikusho!!! " _Juuhachi-gou screamed at him. "Did you _have_ to kill him?!"

>
 "There wasn't any point in talking to him," Trunks growled. "He wasn't listening."

>
 "Maybe I could've made him listen, if you'd waited a minute!"

>
 "And maybe you'd rather he'd blown a smoking hole through me, like you did to Gohan?!" Trunks bit it off, but not before the briefest moment of pain came and went in his companion's eyes. "Juuhachi-gou..."

>
 "Save it. You're right. He was certainly trying to do that, wasn't he?" Standing, Juuhachi-gou kicked Juunana-gou's top half over to face the sky. "Well, might as well finish the job."

>
 "You mean he's not dead?"

>
 "Not until you destroy the head. That's where the main regeneration module is housed. As long as the head remains even partially intact, there's a possibility he can come back to bother us again." She raised a hand, energy starting to gather around the slender fingers.

>
 "I can--"

>
 "_No_." Juuhachi-gou looked straight at Trunks. "Don't try to spare my feelings. I'm not supposed to have any, remember?" Grimly she fired, blowing first one half, then the other, into black shimmering dust. "That should take care of things." Turning, she rose up into the air. "Let's go."

>
 Trunks followed her. For some while they flew in silence; then, finally, Trunks accelerated and drew up beside her in the air. "Juuhachi-gou..."

>
 "Leave me _alone!_" She put on a burst of speed and took off away from him. He followed her. Within minutes she touched down on top of a mesa. By the time he reached her, she was on her knees, hunched over, her head in her hands.

>
 "Juuhachi-gou?" he said, landing beside her. "_Doushitano?_"

What's the matter?"

>
 Her breath came in short, shuddering gasps. "_Yamero..._make it stop..."

>
 "_Nani?_"

>
 Slowly, painfully, she looked up at him. Her eyes were dry; she was beyond tears. "_O..omoidatta..._"

>
 He gasped. "You...remember?!"

>
 "_Zettai...omoidatta._" She shut her eyes tight and hunched over, wrapping her arms tight around herself. "I remember _everything_. Every scream, every cry for help, every face, all of them--oh, God, I can't stand it!!" Her hands fisted in her hair and pulled tight, as if she was about to yank it out of her scalp. "I can't--I can't..."

>
 "_Masaka..." Trunks knelt down in front of her and took her shoulders in his hands. "Juuhachi-gou--Juu-chan. _Listen_ to me. _Look at me_!!!"

>
 She opened her eyes and met his gaze, breathing in shuddering gulps of air.

>
 Trunks drew in a long, cold breath. When he spoke, it was in a low, intense voice, but no less powerful for all that. "You're not the same anymore," he said. "The Juuhachi-gou who helped destroy everything, the one who killed the other senshi, the one who killed Gohan and tried to kill me...she's gone. You're different now. Whatever evil programming Dr. Gero gave you has been wiped out. No one had ever been kind to you, before. Gero certainly wasn't. All he ever showed you was hate and bitterness. You're a different person now. You _are_ a person now, not just a killing machine. You could never do those terrible things again. If you could, you wouldn't be feeling what you're feeling right now."

>
 Juuhachi-gou swallowed hard. "Ho...hontou ni?"

>
 "It's the truth. I swear it." He reached out and gathered her into his arms. She fit herself against his chest and sobbed quietly. As he pressed his cheek to the top of her head, he felt the hatred in his heart crumble to nothing, blown away like dust driven before the skirling wind. At that moment his mother's blood flowed stronger in his veins than his father's. Now, after everything that had happened, he was finally ready to try and find some forgiveness in his proud warrior's heart. Forgiveness for her...and maybe, a little, forgiveness for himself, too.

>
 "Come on," he murmured against her soft, fragrant hair.

"_Kaerimashou._ Let's go home."

>
 Wordlessly Juuhachi-gou nodded. She let him take her hand and together they flew off towards Capsule Corporation...towards home.

>
 Far above the mesa, unobserved, Piccolo watched them go, barely managing to keep a smirk off his face. "Ah, damn, it's good to be alive again," he said.

>

>

**Part Four

> "Come Walk This World With Me"

>

_With the light in our eyes it's hard to see
> Holding on and on till we believe
 With the light in our eyes
it's hard to see
> I'm not touched, but I'm aching to be
 Dust to dust and dream to
dream
> I want you to come walk this world with me.
>
 --Heather Nova, "Walk This World"
>

>

They had one month. One perfect month of peace. The people in Hope City got used to seeing Juuhachi-gou in Trunks' and Bulma's company, and some of them started smiling at her instead of avoiding her. The figures in the tubes began to take on familiar silhouettes, and Bulma spent a lot of time looking at one in particular.

>
 Trunks thought he understood why. His mother had never told him much about his father, at least not how she'd felt about him. She'd been willing enough to tell him stories of the past, about her travels with the young Gokou, how Vegeta came to Earth, the great fights he and Gokou'd had, and how Vegeta had finally come to some sort of grudging acceptance of Gokou as a worthy opponent. But never a word about the private times, nothing about how she and the Saiyajin warrior had drawn close enough to want to bring him into the world. It was as if she'd simply packed all those feelings away and shut the door on them forever.

>
 In a way, Trunks supposed, she had. Bulma was a proud, independent woman; if she'd given herself to Vegeta, it'd been without reserve. His loss had taken part of her with him, and to remember that was to lose what little hope she had for their world getting better. So--practical Kaa-san, as always-- she'd put her love aside. He wondered if in the night, when she worked so late in her lab, she ever took those emotions out of their storage place and let them fill her heart again. He thought maybe she did.

>
 Now there was a chance she could let that part of her soul blossom again and with all his heart Trunks hoped she would. After years of being everything for everyone else... maybe Bulma could finally be happy for herself.

>
 Then the next news report came in of a lone figure attacking and razing a human settlement. Hard on its heels came another. And a third.

>
 "I killed him, I know I killed him!" Juuhachi-gou protested, watching the videotape of the destruction. "Trunks watched me do it. I made sure there was nothing left..."

>
 "He must've gotten a hell of a lot better at regenerating, then," Piccolo observed.

>
 "No. He didn't." Bulma set down her calculator. "I've just worked out the timing of the attacks."

>
 "What difference does it make when Juunana-gou destroyed the villages, Kaa-san?" Trunks asked, perching on the edge of the desk.

>
 "Just this, Trunks; in order for Juunana-gou to destroy this town, over here, then pop up over on this part of the country and do the same thing, he'd have to teleport. There is no way he could fly the distance inbetween and coincide with the times reported."

>
 "So the survivors got it wrong. Kaa-san, they were scared

stiff, running for their lives. They can't be blamed for not being sure of what time it really was."

>
 "Good argument. But cameras don't get scared. " Bulma held up a second videotape. "Private surveillance cameras in a jewelry store recorded Juunana-gou's entrance at precisely 16:03, which tallies with the reports that he hit the city of Riverwalk at that time, or very nearly that time. But he was reported only five minutes later in the village of Teakettle, 200 miles to the north. _Minutes_, Trunks. As far as I know, his flight speed was never fast enough to cover 200 miles in 5 minutes. In order to do that, Juunana-gou would have to be flying at just over Mach 4--nearly 3,000 miles per hour."

>
 "_Masaka..." Trunks looked at the map of the stricken towns. A cold suspicion dawned in the pit of his stomach. "But... he _could_ be in two places in that short amount of time... if there were... _two_ of him."

>
 "Or three. I think maybe this third report is of yet another Juunana-gou-duplicate." Bulma pushed back from the desk and sighed.

>
 "Duplicates of Juunana-gou? _Bakana!_" Trunks snapped. "Who would do such a thing?"

>
 "Juunana-gou would." Everyone turned to face Juuhachi-gou, who was studying the map with a grim face. "My twin had--_has_ a phenomenal ego. Who else would be building androids--true 'artificial beings'--in his image, but Juunana-gou himself?"

>
 Bulma nodded agreement. "We have to face the distinct possibility that Juunana-gou has built himself some serious reinforcements, and in his egotism, made them look just like him."

>
 "Wonderful." Trunks covered his eyes. "How many do you think he has, Kaa-san? "

>
 "I have no idea. I imagine he built one or two, then set them to building others in tandem with him, and then _that_ set took up the task. Exponential increase, you see."

>
 "Meanwhile, if he's smart, Juunana-gou is sitting back supervising the whole thing and letting the robots run the risks." Trunks shook his head. "That means the first one we destroyed-- "

>
 "Was a robot duplicate, and not Juunana-gou at all," Juuhachi-gou finished.

>
 Trunks straightened. "All right, what do we do now?"

>
 "We can't predict where he'll hit next," Juuhachi-gou said.

"Or... maybe we can." She joined Bulma and leaned over the map.

"Seabreeze... Riverwalk... Teakettle... Greentree." She touched each in turn. "Is there any pattern?"

>
 "Well, they're roughly in a straight line..." Bulma chewed her lip. "That would put the next target as Sunbow, here."

>
 Trunks looked at the map, then shook his head. "No, Kaa-san. The next one is here." He touched a different spot, more to the west. "Here in Duster Town."

>
 "Hm? Why do you say that, Trunks-kun?"

>
 Trunks looked up at her and Juuhachi-gou solemnly. "These are the towns that sprang up on the wreckage of the cities the Jinzouningen originally destroyed. Juunana-gou's sending his wind-up doppelgangers to re-trace the track of his last rampage."

>
 "What're we waiting for? Let's go." Piccolo started out the door.

>
 "Piccolo-san! Wait a moment." Bulma held out a hand. "If you do run into the robots at Duster Town, try to bring one back more or less intact. "

>
 "What for?"

>
 "I might be able to reprogram it to lead us back to its headquarters, or trace back its link of command if Juunana-gou is controlling them directly, rather than just programming them and turning them loose."
>
 "Get the head of the serpent, huh? Good idea. Okay. You're on, Bulma. We'll bring you back a little wind-up Juunana-gou dolly."

>
 "Do that." Bulma hefted her Uzi, checking the magazine. "I'll stay here and monitor the incubators--I wouldn't be a whole lot of help anyway." She smiled a little wistfully. "My main strength is in my brain, not in my body."
>
 "Don't knock it." Juuhachi-gou put a hand on her shoulder. "Battles are won by thinking as well as by fighting skill, ne?"

>
 "_Hai_."
>

>

Enma-sama stared down at the small green figure in front of his desk. "You can't be serious, Kami!" he rumbled.
>
 Dende nodded. "Very serious, Enma-sama."
>
 "But it's unheard of! Sending spirits back from Heaven to rejoin the living? There's only one protocol for that; you know very well souls only return to Earth when I send them back to be reborn, and never from Heaven. I can't just let anyone go wandering back to Earth on the off chance it'll find a host body! Never mind the fact that when it's time for a spirit to reach its final reward, there's no returning at all."
>
 "But reincarnation is part of the cycle, as you say." Dende cocked his head. "And how do you know that it isn't their fate to be reborn, Enma-sama? Only Fate is more powerful than any of us who rule the Heavens, even Kaiou-shin."
>
 "That's so. Well, I admit it's possible a greater destiny awaits them." Enma drummed his fingers on the desktop. "Things certainly seem to have fallen into place with surprising ease."

>
 "And there is one more thing. I know you're very busy sorting out the mess Cell and the artificial humans made, aren't you, Enma-sama?"
>
 Enma sighed gustily. "You're right there! I've never had such a backlog of admittees. It's thrown my whole time table off for centuries. The overcrowding is alarming, the paperwork is monstrous... look at me. I haven't had time for a proper workout since the whole thing started. I'm getting out of shape. Flabby. My fighting edge will be lost!"
>
 "Please forgive me, then, for adding to your problems, but lately I've felt something amiss, both on Earth and in the greater reaches of the universe." Dende lowered his head. "I'm too young to be certain of myself, but it seems to me that Earth is once again being threatened, and we both know what will happen if no one's there to defend it."
>
 "Hm? What's that you say? Earth being threatened? Let me see." Enma closed his eyes and concentrated. "Yes," he murmured after a moment. "I think I see what you mean. Like a shadow across the stars, something moving nearer..." he looked down again. "very good. You're learning your job as Kami with remarkable speed."

>
 Dende bowed deeply. "I value your praise beyond anything else."

>
 Pleased, Enma waved a hand. "Oh, well, praise where it's deserved, and all.... *hem* Well, there are, strictly speaking , no _firm _rules against what you ask. And, much as I like Gokou, I have to tell you..." he leaned over the desk and in a stentorian whisper added, "having three Saiyajin warriors up here makes for bad napping. First Gokou comes and pesters me until I release Vegeta from Hell, then the three of them hang around out there raising a ruckus sparring, and Vegeta drops by every day to ask me about some woman and boy down on Earth. _Every day! _ So, I suppose, in the interest of keeping things flowing smoothly up here, I can authorize a special dispensation. I'll even let them keep any skills they've learned since being here, though of course their memories of Heaven will shortly fade, just as they do in any reincarnated soul. How's that for generous, hm?"

>
 "Enma-sama!" Dende bowed again, even more deeply. "I can't believe how large your heart is. This is a _wonderful _thing you're doing. Please, if there's anything I can ever do in return, no matter how small--"

>
 "No, no, I'm grateful to _you_ for bringing these matters to my attention. Saved me more trouble than I want to imagine." Enma drew up a quill and wrote for a few minutes on a scroll, then handed it to Dende. "Here is my special permission for you to return the three Saiyajin's spirits to life. I leave the entire matter in your hands, but I trust you'll let me know how it goes."

>
 "I'll bring a complete report in writing and summarize for you verbally as soon as it's completed," Dende said, accepting the scroll.

>
 The King of the Dead beamed. "Now _there's_ a well-mannered and smart young fellow," he remarked to his attendants. "Why haven't I got anyone that smart working for me? Hm? He'll go far, mark my words. --Come again soon, young Kami! Your company is the best I've had in millennia!"

>
 As soon as he was away from Enma's palace, the pleasant look dropped off Dende's face, to be replaced by intense concentration. / _Piccolo_.../

>
 A few seconds, then: < _Yes, what?_ >

>
 / _Where are you?_ /

>
 < _Chasing some of those irritating robots of Juunana-gou's, what else ? Did you bother me just for that?_ >

>
 / _ALL of you?_ /

>
 < _What? Well, yeah, except for Bulma, she stayed back at--_ >

>
 / _Piccolo-san, if you were fighting a war, and you knew your enemy had a stronghold, how would you take it? By force, or by stealth?_ /

>
 < _What kind of stupid question is-- DAMN! This whole thing's a SETUP! A damn DECOY! I can't BELIEVE I didn't see that!_ >

>
 / _Hurry, then! Or everything's lost_. /

>
 < _Yeah I hear you loud and clear_. > Piccolo pulled up in mid-flight. "Hey, hot-shot, tin girl, change of plans," he said.

>
 "What?" Trunks looped and headed back, pointing at the group of robots they'd found trashing Duster Town less than half an hour ago. "We've got them on the run!"

>
 "Wrong, kid. They've got us right where they want us--chasing them all over the countryside while your mom's at home alone."

>
 "Bulma!" Juuhachi-gou gasped, then slapped her head. "_Bakana_!

It's--"

>
 "A sucker play, you got it. And guess which three people I know have big white sticks glued to their backsides right about now. I'm looking at two of 'em, and you two are looking at the third. Come on. Let's hope we can beat the main forces there. Too bad Gokou never got around to showing me how that teleport of his worked."

>
 The trio sped back towards Hope City, each silent, each wrapped in his or her own thoughts. Piccolo was silently cursing himself for missing such an obvious trick; Trunks was praying, quietly, that they hadn't been delayed too long. Juuhachi-gou...well, her thoughts were her own, but by the look in her eyes, someone would pay if they found they were in fact too late.

>
 As the familiar curve of Capsule Corporation came into view, the morning sun silhouetted a horde of dots on the horizon ahead of them, growing larger second by second as they too raced towards Hope City. Piccolo spat out a curse in Namekian, then said, "Okay. Tin girl, you're down with Bulma. Keep her and the lab safe. Trunks, you're with me. We have to buy time for the Saiyajin to wake up." He pulled to a stop in the sky and closed his eyes. < _Dende_. >

>
 / Hai, _Piccolo-san_. /

>
 < _You were right. We're under attack. Better round up Gokou and the others. We're going to need reinforcements_. >

>
 Trunks drew his sword and turned around. "Juuhachi-gou-- "

>
 Juuhachi-gou took his face in both her hands and kissed him full on the mouth. Trunks was so startled he almost dropped his sword. A blush streaked across his cheeks as Piccolo scowled and grumbled, "We don't have _time_ for this..."

>
 Juuhachi-gou ignored him. She drew back, still cradling Trunks' face in her hands, and smiled. "You two worry about the robots. Leave Bulma to me. I promise you, nothing will touch her as long as I'm standing." With that she let him go and dove downwards, pausing only to open the front door before darting inside.

>
 "Okay, kid. Here's where we find out how good a teacher Gohan was." Piccolo shrugged out of his cape and turban. "I'll hit 'em high, you hit 'em low. Don't bother being a nice guy. We've got to take them out as fast as possible. Got it?"

>
 Trunks shook himself out of a half-daze and nodded. "_Hai_, Piccolo-san." He concentrated and the crackling aura flared around him as his hair lifted and turned to shimmering gold. With a firm grasp on his sword, he flew off with the Namekian to engage the enemy.

>

>

Bulma looked surprised as Juuhachi-gou entered the lab. "Juu-chan? Back already?"

>
 In cool, terse tones, Juuhachi-gou explained the situation. "Juunana-gou was trying to lure us away. He's sending his android duplicates to attack the lab."

>
 Bulma swallowed hard. "How--how many?"

>
 "_Too_ many. Piccolo and Trunks think they can fight them off; we'll find out soon enough. We'll be under attack any--" She lifted her head and listened. _Sounds bad out there_, she mused. "It's begun. How much longer?"

>
 "I don't know." Bulma rubbed her hands over her face. "The incubation process is over. Now all we're waiting for is for their spirits to re-enter their bodies. That's Dende's business; I've done all I can." She fell silent, looking down at her hands, clasped lightly in her lap. She raised them, studying each in turn. They were still slender and graceful, but she could tell they were the hands of a woman, not a girl. "So many years..." she murmured.

>
 "_Nani_?"

>
 "Oh--" Bulma shrugged, started to brush it off, but saw the look in Juu's eyes. "When did you get to know me so well?" she asked, instead, with a wry smile.

>
 "When I started living with you and Trunks." Juuhachi-gou tipped her head to one side. "What about those years?"

>
 "Vegeta... was always so proud of the fact that 'his woman' was one of the prettiest around. Not that he ever said as much. Vegeta was never someone you looked to for complements. Matter of fact, he used to torment me by saying how ugly and loud-mouthed and stupid I was. _ God!_ I hated him for that. It never failed to drive me crazy... until I figured out two things."

>
 "And those were?"

>
 "One, he loved getting me into a temper. It meant he was reaching me, the real me. Two, after a while, he really didn't mean 'ugly' or 'stupid' at all. Words that sounded as if they should hurt me were really a way of telling me he cared."

>
 "Hm." Juuhachi-gou snorted. "Sounds like a stupidly complicated thing to do. Why bother saying 'stupid' if you really mean 'smart'?"

>
 Bulma smiled wistfully. "It--it was a kind of joke, you see, and a kind of private language. Something only the two of us shared the full implications of. And it was the only way he could express himself in words. Saiyajin raised the way Vegeta was raised couldn't admit any weakness, I think, without it becoming fatal. Any emotional warmth would be seen as just that." Reaching up, Bulma touched her own face. "But it's been so long... I'm older, much older than he will be when he comes back. I can't help wondering and worrying, what will he think? Will he still want me?"

>
 "Why shouldn't he? You're his wife."

>
 "Mm, not really. We're not married, never have been. But just let any other man try to come after me and he made it plain whose 'mate' he considered me to be. I suppose by now, living with him, I can be considered his common-law wife." Bulma shook her head.

"There's still a lot I don't know about Saiyajin customs and traditions and feelings, so much I don't think I ever will know. It didn't seem all that important before, but now I can't get it off my mind."

>
 Juuhachi-gou opened her mouth to answer, but never finished as a sudden impact set the lab glassware jangling faintly and shook the floor beneath them. "That was a close one. Maybe we should--" abruptly she broke off, a momentary look of surprise spreading over her features before they smoothed into a placid mask and she collapsed to the floor like a discarded doll.

>
 "_Juuhachi-gou_!!" Bulma gasped, moving to kneel beside the Jinzoningen's still form. "Juu-chan, what's wrong?"

>
 No response. Hastily Bulma checked for pulse and respiration, found neither. Jumping up, she grabbed a stethoscope and applied it to Juu's chest. Faintly through the earpieces she caught a slow, feeble heartbeat. A check of her pupils showed no reaction to light, and Bulma sat back on her heels, puzzled. It was almost as if Juuhachi-gou had dropped into a sudden deep coma. "What in the world..?"

>
 An answer of sorts came with a screech of rending metal as a fist plowed its way up through the lab floor on Juu's other side. With a shriek Bulma threw herself backwards as another fist joined the first and together they tore the plating apart, widening the hole enough for a slender dark-haired form to pull itself through.

>
 With a smirk Juunana-gou stood up and brushed off a few stray bits of earth and tile. Seeming not to notice Bulma's presence, he crouched beside Juuhachi-gou's inert body. "Hi, sis," he said cheerfully, leaning forward to grin down into her blank-eyed face. "Don't bother trying to answer. Your main motor functions have been switched off." He held up a flat black box with several switches and dials on it. "Gero's remote deactivator--remember? Of course, I had to fix it so it wouldn't affect _me_, but it still works pretty well on _you_, looks like."

>
 After a moment of brain-numbing dread at seeing the other artificial human, Bulma steeled herself and started inching slowly back towards her lab table. If she could just reach the Uzi she kept in the bottom drawer for emergencies...

>
 "I was a little upset when I found out you were helping the Saiyajin boy and his mommy dear," Juunana-gou continued. "But I figured with a little help from my friends--the robots I built, that is--and the deactivator, you and I could have a nice long reprogramming session and I could bring you back to your old self. Then we could finish off the humans. Though I guess we really should keep a few around to play with. Otherwise it could get boring."

>
 A tear slid out of Juuhachi-gou's eye and trickled down the side of her expressionless face.

>
 Bulma's hand closed around the drawer handle. Slowly she eased it open, never taking her eyes off Juunana-gou. _That's right, just keep talking to Juu-chan, never mind little me, I'm no threat... yet._

>
 "Hm? What's that you say?" Juunana-gou bent his head to listen to words Juuhachi-gou was incapable of producing. "Hey, what a great idea! I bet she'd be a lot of fun." He looked up right at Bulma and grinned. "Wouldn't you?"

>
 Abandoning all stealth, Bulma yanked open the drawer and grabbed the gun, bringing it to bear as fast as she could on the Jinzouningen. But it wasn't fast enough. Even as her finger started to tighten on the trigger Juunana-gou's hand was closing on the barrel and wrenching it to one side, yanking the Uzi out of Bulma's grip and tossing it to the far side of the lab. In the next second she was hauled off her feet.

>
 "Naughty girl," Juunana-gou said, holding Bulma up by her shirt front and giving her a sharp shake. "That's no way to say 'hello' to a blind date. But it's okay. You can make it up to me later."

>
 Gritting her teeth, Bulma braced herself on the young man's arm and kicked at him. She might as well have been kicking a chair for all the reaction she got. He actually looked pleased as she struggled. "All right!" he exclaimed. "And I was afraid you were going to give up or cower in a corner or something. Guess I really shouldn't have thought that of you. I mean, you were that tough little guy's wife, right? What was his name, Velveeta or something?"

>
 "Vegeta," Bulma hissed at him.

>
 "That's it. Vegeta." Juunana-gou tipped his head to one side and looked pleasantly wistful. "Ah, that was a great fight. Too bad he died. But then, we kind of killed him, didn't we? Do you know what

the last thing he said was right before he snuffed it? He was lying there with a hole blown in him and looking up at us, Juuhachi-gou and me, but I don't think we were really seeing us. He had a funny look on his face, too. I think you humans call it 'sadness' or something. Then he whispered a name... something starting with a 'B'..._What_ did he say, sis? " he asked the inert figure on the floor. Again he pretended to listen. "Oh, yeah, that was it. He said, 'Bulma '." He looked back at the woman struggling in his grip. "Then he shuddered and coughed up a little blood and pow, that was it for him." The artificial human smiled. "Now, isn't that touching? His last thoughts were of you."

>
 "_Chikusho_!!"

>
 "Shouldn't yell at me, little lady. You want to be on my _good _side. You might last a little longer if you are." With a casual move of his arm Juunana-gou sent her flying across the room to crash into a table full of chemicals. Bulma tried to catch herself and felt her arm snap as she landed on it, cutting herself in several places as well as labware shattered beneath her. The pain made the whole world gray out for a few seconds.

>
 When her vision cleared, she saw Juunana-gou walking towards her. As he passed the door to the incubation room, he glanced in, stopped. "'What's this?" He poked his head in. "Whoa, do-it-yourself people. So you're the one who raided Gero's lab. I thought I heard someone wandering around. Too bad I wasn't completely finished regenerating, or I would've come out to say hello. I was hiding out there, planning to reuse the equipment... you slowed me down a lot by taking his notebooks. A little something else I have to thank you for." Drawing back, he turned, walking closer to Bulma as energy began to flicker around one of his hands.

>
 "No--" Bulma moaned, trying to move, groping around desperately for something, anything, to use to shield herself. "Please--"

>
 "Say bye bye," Juunana-gou laughed, watching the expression on Bulma's face as he sent a ki blast winging _behind _him, into the growth tubes and equipment. The explosion shook the entire building. Caught mid-step, Juunana-gou stumbled a bit.

>
 At the same moment Bulma's good hand closed on a beaker that had survived her arrival. She didn't even stop to look at it, just threw it at the Jinzouningen's face. The young man jerked himself aside, but not quite enough; the glass hit and shattered and he screamed as vapors arose from one side of his face. "Acid!" He yelled. "You slut, you threw _acid _on me!!" Blindly he staggered towards the sink beside the table, shoved his head under the faucet and turned on the water full blast.

>
 Taking advantage of his distraction, Bulma staggered to her feet and fled, cradling her broken arm and trying not to scream as the movement jostled it. Reason told her to run; Juuhachi-gou was far too heavy to lift by herself, even if she'd been unhurt. All she could do was try to get outside and get Trunks' or Piccolo's attention. So she ran. Ran for her life, ran for Juu-chan's, though she could hardly see where she was going through tears of pain and heartbreak and despair. _Gone, all gone, it's all over, I don't have any cell cultures left, that was my one chance... oh, Gohan, Son-kun, Vegeta-!_

>
 The corridors of Capsule Corporation turned into a nightmare maze as Bulma stumbled through them, leaving a little trail of blood behind her from her cuts. In the distance she could hear Juunana-gou screaming her name in pure rage as he came after her. Every door she came to she slammed shut behind her, hoping it would delay him an extra second or two. At last she rounded a corner and glimpsed the

huge double doors to the outside ahead. Gasping, she staggered towards them.

>
 Ahead of her, barring her path, a form smashed through the ceiling and dropped in, the left side of his face red and raw. Bulma skidded to a stop, her last strength draining out of her as the adrenaline faded, and fell to her knees. "_Iie_..."

>
 "Oh, Bulma, Bulma, Bulma," Juunana-gou said. "That wasn't friendly. I'm going to have to kill you _very _painfully now." One hand lifted, gathering energy.

>
 With a shiver Bulma closed her eyes. "Trunks..." she whispered. As the light of the energy blast filled the corridor, a sudden wind stirred her hair, bringing with it a cool, clean scent, like a spring morning, and a tingle of energy. Hard on its heels she heard Juunana-gou exclaim, "What the hell!"

>
 Startled, Bulma opened her eyes, not understanding why she wasn't dead until she looked up. Between her and Juunana-gou, shielding her, three figures stood, two taller ones flanking a shorter in the middle. All three were clad in the stark black-and-white of Saiyajin armor, but the two bigger ones bore an emblem on their backs, a bold black kanji drawn on a white circle representing a familiar word: _KAME._

>
 As she tried to make sense of it all the more muscular of the figures, the one closest to her, turned and glanced back over his shoulder, face full of affection and playfulness, and gave her a gentle, familiar smile.

>
 "Oi, Bulma," Gokou said softly. "You look pretty bad. You sit there and rest, ne? We take care of things from now on."

>
 Bulma caught her breath in a sob of wonder. "So--Son-kun...!"

>
 Tipping her a wink, Gokou turned back to face the front, the good-natured look dropping off his features and a grimly amused half-smirk replacing it. "I don't think he's happy to see us," he said quietly.

>
 "Iie, I'm sure he's not, otou-san." Gohan answered from the other side, folding his arms. "I'm not happy to see him either."

>
 "Kakarotto." Vegeta half crouched. "You and Gohan go see if there's any other garbage outside. _This _piece of trash is _MIIIIINE_!" With that shout the Saiyajin prince launched himself forward and slammed into Juunana-gou, smashing through the doors and out into the open. Something small and black clattered to the floor, knocked out of Juunana-gou's grip by the sudden impact.

>
 "Eeeh, knows how to open doors, doesn't he?" Gohan said, giving a nervous little half-laugh.

>
 Gokou nodded. "Always has. Come on, Gohan-kun."

>
 As the other two flew out the door, Bulma hitched herself forward to see what it was Juunana-gou had been holding. The pain threatened to claim her failing senses, but finally her hand closed on the object and she brought it close enough to her face to see it in the dusty gloom. For several minutes she puzzled over it, fighting to concentrate through waves of dizziness, before recognizing it as the remote controller Juunana-gou'd boasted about earlier. Obviously Juunana-gou had somehow shielded himself, but it worked fine on Juu-chan..

>
 Juuhachi-gou.

>
 With all her remaining energy Bulma raised the box and brought it down on the floor. It took three tries, but on the third the box broke open, sparks beginning to emit from it as it shorted out. Bulma tossed it away, then collapsed back against the near wall, exhausted, slipping into semi-consciousness.

>
 Outside, Piccolo and Trunks were the center of a knot of robot duplicates of Juunana-gou. Shattered wreckage of some twenty or thirty more lay strewn on the ground around them. Back to back, they were barely managing to keep their opponents at bay; the sheer numbers were slowly overwhelming them.

>
 "Damn tin cans don't get tired," Piccolo snarled, smashing an elbow into one robot's face, "and they're using wolf pack tactics too. You got any bright ideas, hot shot?"

>
 "Not right now," panted Trunks, swiping a trickle of blood and sweat out of his eyes. "Much more of this, though, and I'm... going to drop out of Super-Saiyajin..."

>
 "Yeah, I was afraid you were going to say that." Pivoting, Piccolo kicked a second robot, sending it flying into the side of Capsule Corporation. It hit, bounced, took a few staggering steps forward, and collapsed, even as another took its place. "Damn. Don't these things know when to lie down and quit?"

>
 "I guess 'give up' isn't in their programming."

>
 "It's not in my 'programming' either. --_HOUFF_!" Piccolo doubled over as a third mecha got in past his defenses and gut-punched him.

>
 "Piccolo-san!" Turning, Trunks slashed at Piccolo's attacker, slicing down through its shoulder and half into the torso, where his sword lodged as it fell motionless. As he pulled on the hilt, trying to get it free, an arm circled his neck, cutting off his air, and dragged him backwards, where more robots were waiting their turn to hit him.

>
 Gritting his teeth, Trunks flew up and flipped upside down in midair, hoping the robot's grip would loosen or shift enough for him to fight his way free. For just a second it did, and in that moment's respite, Trunks got a hand in between his throat and the machine's arm, powered his way out of the hold, then threw a rapid series of punches at his opponent's head and wound up with a savage kick to the midsection that sent the mecha into the ground hard enough to dig a crater as deep as it was tall.

>
 There was no time for feeling gratified, though; five more of the things were headed upward at him. He dropped back to the earth to save strength and half-crouched, gasping. His ki was draining rapidly, he could feel it. If the other warriors were going to wake, they should've done so by now... something has to be wrong. What if--what if another group of these things got inside, to the lab?! We've got to pull back--!_

>
 At that moment something streaked through the sky from the direction of the Corporation, plowing through the group of robots heading at him, and shot past, the wind in its wake whipping up dust and tossing his hair away from his face. Trunks blinked after it, trying to make out some detail in the rapidly moving cluster. There were two bodies there, and faintly he could hear the sound of blows being exchanged as they receded, feel the surge of ki. He was almost certain one of those fighters was Juunana-gou--the real Juunana-gou, this time (and what was he doing in Capsule Corporation? a horrid cold voice whispered in the back of his mind).

>
 And the other... something in it called to him, made his heart rise in a sudden wild hope. I know you, oh Kami-sama I KNOW YOU--_

>
 "_Kaaa-meeeeee_--"

>
 Startled, Trunks whipped back around, cursing himself for what should've been a fatal distraction. Between him and the oncoming mecha, now regrouped, stood a figure in what he recognized as Saiyajin armor. The man had his hands cupped to his right side, and

in those palms energy glowed and grew, blinding to look at.

>
 "--_haaa-meeeeee_--"

>
 The robots paused, searching their data banks for some identification of the new combatant. Finally, in a deep subroutine, added as an afterthought, they found a pattern matching the organic being before them. It was flagged with a two-word instruction: _RUN AWAY_.

>
 "_HAAAAA_!" The man snapped his hands forward, the ki blast leaping almost of its own accord from him and blazing through the cybernetic fighters, reducing them to so much scrap metal dust. As the ones on the outskirts of the blast retreated, the man twisted, dipping his fists. The blast followed the arc of his body, curving gracefully over to follow and tear through each and every one of the mecha until the skies were clear. Only then did he turn and smile at Trunks. "Oi, konban wa," he said. "Trunks, _hai_? Gohan told me about you. I'm--"

>
 "Son Gokou," Trunks finished, his voice almost worshipful. After all, it wasn't every day the greatest warrior of one's time comes back from the dead to personally help you out.

>
 Across the battlefield, Gohan swooped in, catching a flash of a familiar green form in the mob of Juunana-gou-lookalikes below him, and dove headfirst into their midst, exploding in a flurry of fists and feet. Teeth gritted in a cross between a smile and a snarl, he shrugged off every strike, ignoring the pain, until he could reach down and grasp a hand that rose by instinct to find his. Leaning back on his heels, he lifted Piccolo to his feet. For just a moment their eyes met.

>
 "About time you got here, kid," the Namekian growled. "What kept you? Stop for a meal on the way?"

>
 Gohan's eyes crinkled. "_Pic_-colo-san," he sing-songed.

>
 "Don't say it. Don't even think about--"

>
 "_Dai-dai-daisukiiii_!"

>
 "_ARGH_! Now I gotta beat your butt, kid. Right after we trash these damn metal mannequins."

>
 "Yosh, Piccolo-san." Gohan turned to face one way, felt his old mentor place his back against Gohan's to guard it. "Let's do it."

>
 As the remaining robots closed in, so soft no other ears could've heard it, Piccolo said, "Okay... yeah, I missed you too. Satisfied?"

>
 There was no such happiness half a mile away. Vegeta and Juunana-gou were trading punches, the former snarling in rage, the latter smirking as he fielded each strike. "Give it up, old man," the Jinzouningen taunted as they parted briefly. "Juuhachi-gou and I beat you before. What makes you think the rematch will be any more to your favor, huh?"

>
 "_Kono yogore_!!!" Vegeta straightened, eyes savagely pleased, and screamed in defiance as golden fire exploded outward around him, tendrils of lightning shooting through it, finally flushing all the color out of his hair as he burnt a brilliant white-gold with power.

>
 Juunana-gou's eyes widened at the exponential increase in power. "Ma-_masaka_," he gasped. "What--"

>
 "_Yatta._ Super-Saiyajin, _bakayarou_," Vegeta said, and darted in with speed that defeated even the artificial human's senses. One fist curled back and rocketed out, snapping Juunana-gou's head halfway around. "This is for my son, who grew up without a father to train him and teach him the heritage of his blood." Another blow, snapping the young cyborg's head the other way. "This is for my

woman--you remember her, the one you were probably planning to rape, then torture to death." Drawing back, Vegeta concentrated, power filling his hands with tendrils of light. "And this... this is for _me_." Thrusting his cupped hands forward till they almost touched Juunana-gou's chest, he smiled with a cold satisfaction. "_FINAL FLASH_."

>
 The sky lit, bright enough to cast a second shadow over the battlefield. Instinctively all the fighters looked up. "Vegeta," Gokou observed, shading his eyes. "Nice control."

>
 "Su...sugoi_," Trunks said voice shaking. _So powerful--more so than the other time's Vegeta... is this my father? Will he even recognize me, or care?_ He turned away, one hand clenching. _I've tried to do him proud--do Gohan-san proud--will it matter to him? _

>
 Back at Capsule Corporation, Bulma felt a hand on her shoulder, clenching down with a fair amount of force. The pain stirred her from her half-faint, made her moan in protest.

>
 "Shhh..." a soft female voice. "I know it hurts, Bulma, but not as bad as that arm has to."

>
 "Juu...Juu-chan..?"

>
 "_Hai, sou na_." The hand lifted and gripped above her elbow. "Hold on now. That nerve block won't last without pressure, but it should be numbed enough to keep this from being too bad." A *crunch* echoed by a twinge of new pain shook Bulma. This time she managed not to cry out. "The controller..." she whispered as Juuhachi-gou began to splint the injured arm.

>
 "You did quite a good job of breaking it. Speaking of 'break', sorry about this. I heard everything that was going on, but there wasn't anything I could do."

>
 "Never expected you to--" Bulma coughed, feeling the air catch in her throat. Juuhachi-gou glanced up, then around. The air was filling with a haze of dust and smoke; she hadn't paid any attention, too intent on getting up and stopping her twin when she'd found herself able to move again, but it looked like the lab had well and truly caught fire. _And if that's so, there may be more explosions. Certainly some bad fumes. The lab's sealed off now, so it shouldn't spread beyond there before the automatics extinguish it, but I have to finish this up fast and get Bulma out into the fresh air._ She studied the human woman's face as she worked quickly. _Pale, skin a bit clammy, sweating. Looks like shock. Little wonder. Hope Trunks is all right. I'll need his help in tending to her._ She paused a bare moment to listen. _Damn, it's gone quiet outside. I wonder if that's a good sign or a bad sign_. "There," she announced, tucking the arm into the makeshift sling she'd rigged and lifting Bulma as gently as she could. "Hold on." She walked out the front doors and down the steps, stopping at the bottom to set Bulma down and make her as comfortable as possible, knelt beside her. "You rest," she said quietly, and stood up, hands on hips to look around. Nearby she could see Trunks and Piccolo, and two other men. She blinked, then shrugged. _Well, well, so the Saiyajin survived. How...? Never mind. First things first._ She lifted a hand and called out, "Oi, Trunks. Get over here. Your mother's hurt."

>
 Hearing the familiar voice, Trunks glanced over. "Kaa-san?" he said, heart taking a sudden skip. _Juunana-gou! THAT'S what he was doing--!_ "How? Did Juunana-gou get to her? I thought you were going to protect her!"

>
 "Juunana-gou had Gero's _baka_ controller. He switched me off!"

>
 Gohan looked over and turned white. "Ji--Juuhachi-gou," he gasped, dropping into a crouch and starting to summon his ki..

>
 "Who?" Gokou said, scratching his head. "Hey, she's pretty. Your girl, Trunks?"

>
 "No--well, not exactly, Gokou-san, but--I mean, she--" Blushing a little, Trunks broke off as he felt Vegeta's presence growing very near, very fast. "_Kuso_. We've got to let him know--"

>
 A blue and white streak shot past and barreled in towards Capsule Corp, only speeding up as Juuhachi-gou and Bulma came into sight. Juuhachi-gou had enough time to look around, recognize the incoming form, and gasp, "_Chikusho--!!_", in the second before Vegeta rammed into her and knocked both her and himself through the remains of the dome.

>
 "We've got to stop him!" Trunks leapt that way, fatigue momentarily forgotten as he ran. "He'll kill her!"

>
 "_Nani_? You make it sound like that's a bad thing," Gohan said, matching pace with the younger man.

>
 "Take it from me, kid, this is one case where it's bad," Piccolo said, coming up on Gohan's other side. "We don't want the tin girl taken apart, got it?"

>
 "_Hai_, Piccolo-san." Gohan nodded, accepting without question. "_Wakatta._"

>
 Trunks skidded to a stop beside Bulma, dropping to one knee as the others lifted off and shot past him, trying to catch up to Vegeta. "Kaa-san?" he said anxiously, seeing her pale face.

>
 Crystal-blue eyes fluttered open and focused on him slowly. "Trunks..." With a little hiss of pain, Bulma pulled herself together and looked around. "Where's--"

>
 From high above a ringing cry answered her question: "Jinzouningen, _SHIIIIII-NNNNEEE_!"

>
 "Oh, _kuso_," Bulma muttered, squinting skyward. "Vegeta's after Juu-chan."

>
 "Ha-_hai_, Kaa-san."

>
 "_Bakamono_. He always _did_ have the worst temper... you go on; I'll be fine."

>
 "You're sure?"

>
 Bulma gave her son a long look. "I've waited twenty years to see that _baka_ again; I'm not about to die and let him get off easy. Go on, shoo shoo shoo." She waved a hand.

>
 With a nod Trunks flew up, pushing his exhaustion aside. He could see the other senshi jockeying for position, Gokou trying to get an armlock on Vegeta while Gohan and Piccolo ran interference. The furious Vegeta was twisting and dodging and weaving through them, snarling like a madman, obviously seeing nothing but Juuhachi-gou. As he drew near, Vegeta whipped around and slammed a booted foot into Gokou's chest, sending him plummeting; used his momentum to plant an elbow into Gohan's stomach; and flung up one hand to ki-blast Piccolo, all in the space of a heartbeat. Not enough to seriously hurt any of them, but it did clear his path to his target. Both hands came up, light searing around them as Vegeta gathered strength for a killing strike.

>
 With the last of his strength Trunks put on a burst of speed and shot inbetween the Saiyajin prince and Juuhachi-gou, dropping out of Super-Saiyajin and holding out both hands. "Otou-san! _Papa_! _DAME DAAAA_!"

>
 Dark eyes fixed on him, and for one blink of time Trunks saw nothing but battle rage in them, no recognition or awareness of him as anything but another enemy. Then Vegeta caught his breath, eyes widening as he took in the stranger before him, and the energy gathering in his palms vanished. "'O--tou-san'...?" he repeated, the snarl being replaced by a scowl that was half-irritated and

half-puzzled. Slowly, slowly he lowered his hands, drifted nearer to peer into Trunks' face. The scowl, too, began to fade, replaced by a look that was almost one of wonderment. "...Trunks?"

>
 Trunks swallowed, tried to keep his features schooled to calm and show nothing of the sudden urge he'd had to fling his arms around this fierce stranger. Father or not, he knew better than to try it. Vegeta would never accept open affection from any son of his--that wasn't a warrior's way. Instead he nodded once. "_Hai_, Papa. Trunks."

>
 "Hm." Vegeta folded his arms, smirked, and looked his son up and down, then glanced over at Gohan. "Maybe you didn't do as pitiful a job as I thought you would've at training him. But I'll have to test him myself to be sure of that." He swung his gaze back to Trunks. "Now stand aside, boy. I have unfinished business."

>
 "_Iie_, Papa. It's finished. You mustn't hurt Juuhachi-gou."

>
 "_Nanda yo?!_" Vegeta's anger blazed up again. "Who are you talking to?!"

>
 "Ah, Vegeta, maybe you should--" Gokou started, only to be rounded on by the Saiyajin prince.

>
 "_Shizuka na!_" Vegeta roared. "Kakarotto, when I want your opinion, I'll BEAT IT OUT OF YOU!"

>
 "But, Vegeta--" Gokou tried again, then ducked at Vegeta sent a blast whizzing at him. "Oi! Watch that!"

>
 "Cut it out and simmer down, Vegeta," Piccolo growled, "before I pull your hair out and make you eat it."

>
 "Try it, green man," Vegeta smirked.

>
 "Let's go for it."

>
 "Oi, oi, this isn't getting us anywhere!" Gohan waved his hands. "Trunks, why shouldn't we kill Juuhachi-gou?"

>
 "Because she's not the enemy," Trunks said.

>
 "Since when?!"

>
 "Since she escaped from Gero's programming and regained her own personality. She's been living with Kaa-san and me for almost four months now. After I killed her--"

>
 "_Nani_?" Gohan blinked. "You killed...?"

>
 "I killed them both. But... they regenerated themselves. Like Perfect Cell."

>
 "Perfect Cell? Who's that?"

>
 Trunks shook his head. "Long story, Gohan-san. I promise I'll tell it all. But for right now the important thing is--"

>
 "Not to kill Trunks' girl," Gokou finished.

>
 Silence.

>
 "Trunks'.... girl," Vegeta said softly.

>
 Trunks gave Gokou a long-suffering look.

>
 A soft voice broke in at that point. "Do I get to say something here? This is my life we're talking about." Juuhachi-gou drifted closer, swiped her hair out of her face, and looked steadily at Vegeta. "I don't expect forgiveness from you. I did a lot of terrible things because Gero made me hate everything and everyone. That's finished now." She looked from Vegeta to Gohan. "I'm...sorry I killed you. I'm sorry for everything I did before. I know that sounds hopelessly inadequate, but there's nothing I can do to change the past. Right now, I just want to live my life and let everyone else live theirs." Then she glanced at Trunks, one pale eyebrow raising. "And since when am I 'your girl'?"

>
 "Aa...ano...."

>
 "_Zakennayo!_" Vegeta spat. "_Masaka!_" Any son of mine would sooner kill a thing like you than--"

>
 "Papa, SHUT UP!" Trunks bellowed, temper snapping. Before he

knew it one fist had snagged the front of Vegeta's body suit, just below the open collar, and pulled him in so close they were practically nose to nose. "I am your son, and I did want to kill her--at first. But she really is a different person. I grew up hating her. I watched her destroy this planet. If I can accept that she's different now, then so can you." He let go of his father, drew back a bit, swiped the back of his hand at the tears he now found slipping down his cheeks. "I want you to approve of me, but I can't stand by and let you kill Juuha--no. Juu-chan."

>
 "'Juu-chan'," Vegeta mocked, sneering. "Do you mean to tell me you have feelings for this..." He waved a hand at Juuhachi-gou.

"This thing?"

>
 "She's not a thing . She's a woman. A beautiful, brave, sensitive woman. And I'm not really sure how I feel about her..." He looked at Juuhachi-gou, who returned his gaze with dawning wonder. "But I'd like to find out." Defiantly Trunks locked eyes with his father, not flinching under Vegeta's dark, relentless glare. "And...I intend to."

>
 After a few seconds a slow half-smile spread across Vegeta's features. "That settles that," he said. "As stupid and as stubborn and sentimental as your mother, as hot-tempered and foolhardy and disrespectful as me. You're my whelp all right." The smile vanished as he shot a look at Juuhachi-gou. "This isn't over, Jinzouningen. I'll be watching you. One mistake, and you're scrap."

>
 "Hai hai, wakatta na. One wrong move and I'm dead." Juuhachi-gou sighed and rolled her eyes. "I ought to just start passing out business cards that say 'Greetings, I come in peace, please don't kill me, I'm a good little Jinzouningen now'..."

>
 Trunks muttered, "I'll have Kaa-san call the print shop tomorrow--aa! Kaa-san! I almost forgot-!" He let himself drop, the other warriors right behind him.

>
 "She should be stable," Juuhachi-gou said as they landed. "And since the smoke has stopped drifting out the door, it looks like the extinguisher system has dealt with the fire. But the lab's a complete loss."

>
 "We'll rebuild. We've done it before." Trunks leaned over, checking Bulma. "I think she's asleep."

>
 Without a word Vegeta moved Trunks out of the way and scooped Bulma up, so gently she never even stirred. "Tend to other things, boy," he said over one shoulder. "I'll see to it she's taken care of." Rising, he flew into Capsule Corporation.

>
 "Takes care of him for a while." Piccolo folded his arms, glanced over at Gohan. "We got a lot of catching up to do, kid."

>
 "Hai, Piccolo-san." Gohan scratched his head. "I, I know we were together in Heaven, but somehow I can't remember too much of that right now..."

>
 "Reincarnation does that to you. I'm surprised you remember that much--eh?" Piccolo's hand shot out and tugged at the brown belt around Gohan's waist. "What the hell is this?!"

>
 As Trunks watched, the belt suddenly unwrapped itself and the end curled around Piccolo's wrist. "My tail," Gohan said happily.

>
 The look of surprise and consternation on Piccolo's face was almost too comical to withstand. "Tuh-tail," he gasped finally, then got hold of himself. "Oh yeah. I guess this thing grew back with the rest of you, huh? Knew I should've mentioned that to Bulma." Still holding the furry length, Piccolo lifted two fingers, preparing to strike. "Hold still a second."

>
 A hand shot out and stopped him.
>
 "_Iie_," Gokou said simply. "Leave Gohan's tail where it is."

>
 "Are you nuts, Gokou?" Piccolo shot back. "After all the trouble these things caused?"

>
 "Na, I'm not nuts." Gokou unfurled his own tail, gestured at it. "I'm keeping mine this time too. The moon's not here anymore, so it's not a problem." He smiled over at Trunks. "Maybe we get you to grow yours back too, ne?"

>
 "Otouto-san!" Gohan now looked almost as bewildered as Piccolo had earlier. "_Naze_? Why?"

>
 "I did some thinking while we were up in Heaven--" Gokou scratched his head. "Well, I _think_ I did some thinking."

>
 "That's a first," muttered Piccolo.

>
 "Anyway..." Gokou shrugged. "Never had my tail as a grown-up. Never had anyone to teach me how to control it. But Vegeta knows. It made him hard to beat, that first time, you remember Gohan?"

>
 "_Hai_, otouto-san."

>
 "Kame-sennin once told me that the difference between a wise man and a fool is that the wise man knows he doesn't know everything, and admits it. The fool won't admit he doesn't know everything, not even to himself, so he never learns any better. I think maybe since we have a second chance, we should learn about what our tails can do for us that's good instead of bad. If we don't like them, we can take them off after that and not lose anything, see?"

>
 "Damn, Gokou," Piccolo snorted, "since when did spending time dead make your brain start working?"

>
 Gokou put a hand behind his head and grinned merrily, flashed a "V" sign with the other. "Sankyuu, Piccolo-san! Now you admit I have a brain after all! In front of people too!"

>
 "_D'OH_!" Piccolo clapped a hand over his eyes and groaned as the other warriors laughed.

>
 When the laughter quieted, Juuhachi-gou swiped a stray lock of hair back into place and said, "One question. Juunana-gou blew the incubation room to shards. How did you three survive?"

>
 "And how did you come back with your clothes? " Piccolo added. "_I_ woke up naked; why didn't you three?"

>
 / Gomen...that was MY doing, Piccolo-san. /

>
 Everyone jumped as the gentle voice sounded in their heads.

"What the hell was _that?_" Juuhachi-gou gasped, looking around.

>
 "The voice of God," Piccolo muttered.

>
 "Dende-san!" Gohan grinned.

>
 "That's what I said."

>
 / I'm afraid I made a terrible mistake--I'm still very inexperienced at being a deity, you know. / Dende's gentle voice held the faintest hint of amusement. _/ You see, instead of sending the souls of Gokou-san, Gohan-san and Vegeta-san to join with their bodies, I mistakenly brought their bodies to my realm to join with their souls. It was an unforgivable oversight on my part. Quite clumsy of me, really. /_

>
 Piccolo grinned fiercely. "Yeah, right. Accident my left horn. You _knew_ Juunana-gou was about to destroy the lab and you snatched their bodies up to save them. Don't teach your grandfather to chew cheese, squirt. Of course, that still doesn't explain the clothes."

>
 / Well, of course, since they were all standing around naked, it wouldn't have been polite or proper to let them come home without any clothes on, and considering the circumstances, Saiyajin armor seemed appropriate. /

>
 Piccolo grunted. "Man, I don't know how much more of this I can stand. First Gokou gets a brain, next Dende gets sneaky. Maybe I should retire and take up flower arranging."
>
 A soft, ethereal chuckle. _/ But I have intruded long enough. Please, Gokou-san, everyone, come and visit whenever you like. I'll be here. Ato de... /_
>
 "Bai bai, Dende-sama!" Gokou said, waving madly at thin air. "Sankyuu!!!!"
>
 "Now, what's this about Perfect Cell'? Gohan asked. "What _is_ Perfect Cell?"
>
 "_Was_ Perfect Cell, Gohan-san. It's--he's--dead now, thank Kami." Trunks sat down on the nearest stair. "It all started with Dr. Gero..."
>

>

With a little gasp Bulma sat up, then caught her breath , feeling stiff and sore but a _lot_ better than she had a few hours earlier. For a moment the surroundings made no sense, caught as she still was halfway in slumber that'd been cut short by a bad dream. Then things clicked into place and she recognized her own room at Capsule Corp. She sank back against the pillows, shivering as she remembered bits and pieces of the dream--Juunana-gou rising from the dead a third time, then melting like wax and turning into Perfect Cell... Firmly she put the pictures out of her mind and looked at herself. Her arms were swathed in bandages, and her broken limb had been properly placed in a plasti-steel cast. She wiggled the fingers experimentally--it hurt, but not too terribly much. She'd just have to take things a little slower than usual. Nodding in satisfaction, she started to swing her legs out from beneath the covers.

>
 "Where are you going, _baka_?"
>
 For the second time Bulma winced as she jumped. Then everything was forgotten as the speaker came out from the shadows by the window, where he'd been standing. He'd changed out of the armor into his usual black t-shirt and pants, and Bulma thought she'd never seen anything so magnificent in her life. "Don't call me stupid," she managed to force out against the rapidly rising lump in her throat.

>
 "I'll call you whatever I want. I'm your mate, woman, and you'll do as you're told."
>
 "Says who?!"
>
 "I say so." Vegeta paced over and stood by the bed, arms folded, staring down at her. Something rustled softly against the leg of his jeans, and following the motion, Bulma caught her breath as she saw his tail lazily curl and uncurl. "Oh God, I forgot about those," she moaned, collapsing back to the pillows a second time. "I _knew_ there was something I needed to do--"
>
 "I don't think so. Maybe Kakarotto and his barely-smarter-than-a-rock offspring will let their tails be taken, but now that I have mine back, it stays." Reaching out, he switched on the bedside light, and Bulma instinctively held up a hand to shield her eyes for a moment at the flare. Then a hand under her chin tilted her face up to meet Vegeta's searching gaze.
>
 "Hmph," Vegeta said after a moment. "I'd hoped a little age would improve your looks. Instead, you're as ugly as ever. Maybe even uglier, though I didn't think that was possible." He mock-sighed.

"Good thing this miserable ball of mud has me to make sure no other man ever looks too closely at you. Any man that looks at you too long besides me would drop in his tracks."

>
 Bulma blinked rapidly. _I will not, I will NOT start crying--_ Aloud she said tartly, "Oh? And what's your excuse?"

>
 "I'm Saiyajin. I'm too tough to be affected, though of course I notice how hideous you are."

>
 "_Bakayarou_!"

>
 "Did I mention you have a foul temper also?"

>
 Balling up her good fist, Bulma swung at him. Vegeta caught it easily and sat on the edge of the bed, studying the little fist closely, as if it were the most interesting thing he'd ever seen. Then he carefully forced the fist open, drew Bulma's palm to his lips for a gentle kiss.

>
 At that touch Bulma's self-control shattered. The tears burst out of her in a storm delayed for years as she reached for him. "Vegeta--"

>
 A moment was all it took for him to be beside her, arms wrapping around her. Bulma clung to him, her sobs so hard she shook the whole bed. The Saiyajin warrior said nothing, but his arms tightened just a bit more on her, holding her close until she cried herself out. "Idiot woman," he husked in her ear.

>
 "Ha_hai_," Bulma said, struggling to get her voice back under control. Abruptly she felt a tremor run through Vegeta and, startled, looked up at him.

>
 Vegeta's eyes were tight shut, the shadows of some inner struggle skating across his features from time to time. Finally he opened his eyes and looked at her. "I...have...missed you, Bulma," he said, voice soft yet fierce.

>
 With a tiny sigh of wonder, Bulma reached up to touch his face, then curled against his chest. Turning just a bit, Vegeta reached for the lampcord and pulled it, setting the room to darkness once more, and drew the bedcovers up over them both.

>
 "Vegeta..." Bulma said timidly after a moment.

>
 "What?"

>
 "Your stomach's growling."

>
 "To hell with my stomach."

>

~~*owari*~~~ (for now...)

>
 _Ossu! Ora Gokou! Next time on _Tales of the Future World: Dragon Ball Super Z, _ something strange happens to Gohan.

Gohan-kun! Fight it! I'm with you! Can even a Fusion between me and Vegeta defeat the evil force that's trying to destroy my son???

** Kakarotto! Does your tiny mind comprehend the concept of 'Never again'?!** See you next time in _"dead souls", _our second story--coming as soon as we can make Juu-chan and Bulma-san write it!

^_^* Jaa!_

>

End
file.